Runaway Wives, Urban Crimes, and Survival Tactics in Wartime Beijing, 1937–1949

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Runaway Wives, Urban Crimes, and Survival Tactics in Wartime Beijing, 1937–1949

Zhao Ma

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To Kaiyang and Shuping

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On a chilly morning in late 2014, I took my son, Kai, to the Missouri History Museum for what I anticipated would be a great tour of the local history of St. Louis. In the following hour or so, we walked through a couple of exhibits from the Louisiana Purchase, the 1904 World's Fair, and the Missouri Immigrant Experience. Before my five-year-old got bored with the "one-on-one instructional session," I set him free in the Museum's gift shop. He clearly liked being surrounded by playthings. While watching his fingers flip through local history books and biographies, posters and postcards, puzzles and plush toys, my eyes accidentally landed on a stack of bumper stickers that proclaimed "Well-Behaved Women Seldom Make History." Unexpectedly but quite amusingly, my son had led me to find this bold statement by historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich that provided the perfect punch line for the book that has taken me ten years to write.

This book is about a group of unruly women making history in a war-torn city in China. It is about their everyday struggles with hunger, poverty, and domestic strife. It is about their survival. As they managed to get by against all sorts of odds, they broke laws, went to trial, and testified in court, all of which make their stories known to us.

The work to uncover the fragments of women's survival experiences and to piece them together to make a larger historical meaning took place in Baltimore, Buffalo, St. Louis, and Beijing. Through the process of this book's production, I have benefited from the insights and comments of many mentors, friends, and colleagues. In Baltimore, I have been truly fortunate to work with two excellent mentors at the Johns Hopkins University: Bill Rowe and Tobie Meyer-Fong. Bill's erudite knowledge of urban history and modern China has shaped the

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Now, I can tell my dad, Ma Dazheng, and my mom, Zhang Mei, "The book is done!" They have been waiting for years to hear these words, and without their support it would have taken much longer. My deepest debt is to my wife, Shuping, for her love, companionship, patience, and unwavering support during the seemingly long and arduous process of research, writing, and publication of this book. Her passion and encouragement have always been an endless source of inspiration and have driven me to do a better job. Finally, my son, Kai, a miracle baby and beautiful boy, has grown up with this book. He has never failed to remind me that there are things more important than writing a book. Most importantly, he continuously inspires me to stay grateful, remain hopeful, and think about the full meaning of life.

—Zhao Ma, January 2015

Introduction

It was the late summer of 1943 in Japanese-occupied Beijing, and economic insecurity had upset twenty-one-year-old Li Yang Shi's precarious life.[1] Having struggled to get by in an occupied city ravaged by war, she had come to the painful realization that her husband, Li Youxun, who was twelve years her senior and engaged in some form of petty trade, was unable to support her. To secure her future livelihood, Li Yang Shi started working with her neighbor, a man named Liu Fulai, to recycle waste paper scraps in an open market near her home. Liu Fulai was twenty-one years old, single, apparently better off, and willing to help. The business partnership not only helped Li Yang Shi financially; it also grew into a warm and affectionate bond, and ultimately a sexual relationship, between her and her neighbor. At first, she and Liu Fulai tried to hide their affair from her husband. But one day they went out to watch a film together, and she did not return home until one o'clock in the morning. When Li Youxun confronted her, Li Yang Shi told him the truth about where she had been that night, as well as about her affair. Li Youxun might have felt humiliated and angry at such outright infidelity, but he did not punish her. Perhaps he hoped to win her back, or maybe he was willing to turn a blind eye to his wife's affair in exchange for financial help from her business partner. Whatever the reason might have been, the affair continued with Li Youxun's knowledge.

In early 1944, as the city's economy further deteriorated, so too did Li Youxun's financial situation. At this juncture, Liu Fulai gave his word

1. In criminal cases, a woman is often identified by the surname of her husband and by her maiden name (in that order), followed by Shi. In Li Yang Shi's case, her husband's surname was Li and her maiden name was Yang.

to Li Yang Shi that he would bring her "good food and decent clothing" (*haochi haochuan* 好吃好穿) if she married him and came with him to his hometown in Tong County, about twenty kilometers east of Beijing. Li Yang Shi hesitated for a while but finally agreed. On the chilly morning of February 28, she left home, joined Liu Fulai, and walked to Qianmen East Station, the main railway terminal in Beijing. After purchasing tickets and passing the security checkpoints, they boarded a train bound for Tong County. As the train moved slowly away from the platform and the familiar city skyline faded away, Li Yang Shi likely began envisioning her new life. However, back at her home in Beijing, Li Youxun had notified the police and singled out Liu Fulai as the prime suspect responsible for his wife's disappearance. Before officers at Li Youxun's home district acted on this specific tip to make an arrest, police officers on routine neighborhood patrol at Tong County caught Liu Fulai and Li Yang Shi at a wayside inn. They were immediately transferred back to Beijing and, on March 6, 1944, Liu Fulai went on trial at the Beijing District Court, facing charges of adultery and abduction.[2]

Li Yang Shi's story is found in a criminal trial file (*xingshi shenpan dang'an* 刑事審判檔案) held at the Beijing District Court, in the archival category "Offenses against the Institutions of Marriage and the Family" (*fanghai hunyin jiating zui* 妨害婚姻家庭罪), currently housed at Beijing Municipal Archives. The crime category covers three offenses including bigamy (*chonghun* 重婚), adultery (*tongjian* 通姦), and abduction (*youguai* 誘拐); and cases span the period from 1939 to 1949. Case files like Li Yang Shi's bring to light several important features of political and social life in wartime Beijing: the political turmoil and wars (and fear of wars) shattering the urban economy, the shortage of food and other major consumable items becoming increasingly permanent and systemic, abject poverty, women breaking moral and legal codes in their attempts to secure a livelihood, police officers on the beat responding to various crime alerts, and the court adjudicating on domestic disputes. These features provide key threads—regime changes, massive poverty, ill-fated social reform movements, and the

2. BPDFFY, J65-8-6347, Liu Fulai 1944. All citations from the Beijing Municipal Archives in this book follow their cataloging conventions. The citation numbers refer to category (*quanzong* 全總), catalogue (*mulu* 目錄), and volume (*juan* 卷) All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

state-building processes through crime fighting—that underscore some of the main themes in writing urban and women's history of pre-war and wartime China. In reading these grand narratives, our attention is drawn to the institutions and individuals who made the urban social structure and moral order, as well as to those who defined the roles and rules for women in wartime Beijing and beyond.

Yet, Li Yang Shi's story, along with other stories documented in criminal case files, also reveals another set of elements that characterize women's experiences in wartime Beijing. Women found it difficult to obtain and maintain formal jobs, but they could explore opportunities in the pervasive informal economy, which was built on handicraft production, petty trade, and illegal dealing. Neighbors and neighborhood ties were for women a crucial resource in their daily struggle to make ends meet, as they engaged in and broke away from relationships according to their economic and emotional needs. Moreover, modern forms of transport improved geographic mobility and connected women along a regional tapestry of commerce and crime. These fragments of plight and pleasure organized women's daily lives; and in tracing them, we are able to shift our focus from the "makers," i.e., leaders, ideologies, political parties, civic organizations, laws, and even official languages, to the "everyday tactics" that lower-class women devised and utilized in their personal efforts to cope with the terrifying forces of war, occupation, poverty, reformist campaigns, and revolutionary politics.

I borrow the concept of "everyday tactics" from Michel de Certeau's book *The Practice of Everyday Life*, which refers to a range of commonplace practices—"talking, reading, moving about, shopping, cooking, etc."[3] Embedded in people's everyday struggles and pleasures, these activities reflect attempts to "constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into 'opportunities'" and "continually turn to their own ends forces alien to them."[4] They "conceal a logic of their own" by offering and reproducing "a menu from which subjects chose already worked out actions according to their perceived needs."[5] Being "an art of the weak," Certeau argued that everyday tactics allowed people to live with, but *not* surrender to, the constellation of Foucauldian institutions—the imposed system of

3. Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. xvii.
4. Ibid, p. xix.
5. Ward, *The Certeau Reader*, p. 100.

discipline and punishment—that aims to mold the mind, body, and spirit of the people.[6] By placing everyday tactics at the center of inquiry, I am able to explore in this book important questions such as how changes in politics and society affected the meaning and function of the city for women during the war. How did these changes empower or endanger women's lives? How were women's survival tactics different from men's? How did lower-class women's experiences differ from those of the elite? How did everyday struggles in a war-torn city shape women's understanding of their personal identity, especially their gender and marital roles? And how did women respond to the state's propaganda, policing system, and mobilization efforts that attempted to reformulate public policies and influence domestic relationships? The answers to these questions illuminate an informal system of values and practices based on the intimate knowledge of urban economic and social space, neighborhood networks, customary practices, and conventional social and gender roles, all of which informed and justified women's everyday survival tactics.

These survival tactics, and the logic behind them, bring to light two different worlds and world orders: one was defined by administrative policies, security measures, reformist rhetoric, legal codes, and revolutionary agendas. This world was official, orderly, civilized, administered, and male-centered.[7] In contrast, there was another world characterized by an informal economy, customary practices, neighborhood networks, a hierarchical pattern of household authority, illegitimate relationships, and criminal enterprises. This world was unofficial, flexible, unruly, chaotic, ambiguous, and laden with crimes. My book focuses on the latter world—the underworld, which was the world lower-class women like Li Yang Shi inhabited. By examining precisely how her world became the underworld, and by tracing the places and moments when

6. Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 37.
7. Thanks in large part to the outpouring of research on urban history since the late 1980s, we have become familiar with this official world. The important works in this category include Shi, *Zouxiang jindaihua de Beijingcheng*; Strand, *Rickshaw Beijing*; and Madeleine Yue Dong, *Republican Beijing*. This urban reform ideology was not limited to Beijing but inspired and guided a national urban administration movement that transformed other cities across China. For works on other regional settings, see Esherick, *Remaking the Chinese City*; Tsin, *Nation, Governance, and Modernity in China*; Stapleton, *Civilizing Chengdu*; Lipkin, *Useless to the State*; and Carroll, *Between Heaven and Modernity*.

the underworld and its world order met the official one, I seek to understand how the underworld was organized and operated, as well as what it meant to a woman living in it.

Arguably up until the late nineteenth century, most women of Beijing lived in the underworld, and most of them were quite accustomed to and comfortable with it; but then in the first half of the twentieth century, inclusive of the wartime period, urban administrators and social leaders launched campaigns aiming to change the underworld's political ambivalence, moral ambiguities, and criminal potential. Yet, the underworld survived and continued to operate on its own terms despite the massive efforts to transform it. Furthermore, the survival tactics embedded in and reproduced by everyday experience in the underworld, I argue, opened endless possibilities for lower-class women to modify the male-dominated city and, more importantly, to subtly deflect, subvert, and "escape without leaving" the powerful masculine forces of the surveillance state during and beyond wartime Beijing.

City in Crisis

From 1937 to 1949, Beijing was in a state of crisis. It began when, on the night of July 7, 1937, the sound of gunshots broke the calm of an otherwise quiet evening in Wanping County, about nine kilometers west of Beijing. The Japanese army had attacked the Chinese troops stationed nearby. Both sides exchanged fire, and the clash continued throughout the night. At sunrise, the Japanese called in reinforcements while the Chinese held their position despite having suffered some casualties. On July 9, the two sides signed a ceasefire agreement. To ordinary Chinese residents and the Western expatriate community in Beijing, the ensuing days were characterized by "an unnatural calm."[8] "Life inside Peking went on almost as before," one American sojourner recalled, "and one wondered if this was only one more false alarm, a summer madness to be blown away with the dust."[9] Beneath the surface calm, however, there were intense negotiations going on between the two sides. The Japanese

8. Lum, *My Own Pair of Wings*, p. 196.
9. Ibid.

army laid out its terms for peace. It demanded that the Nationalist (GMD) authority dismiss the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), remove anti-Japanese officials from government, outlaw anti-Japanese organizations, eliminate anti-Japanese activities, and withdraw Chinese troops stationed inside the city of Beijing. Concerned that any concession would be tantamount to surrendering the city and its surrounds to Japan, the Chinese army refused to comply.[10] Fighting continued. The Japanese army moved swiftly, and in a matter of days, the Chinese defense collapsed and surrendered Beijing to the Japanese on July 29, 1937.

The Japanese invasion and Chinese resistance turned the Beijing-Tianjin metropolitan area and much of greater north China into a war zone. Military campaigns and occupation caused political anarchy and social disorder for weeks. Once the fighting was over, the Japanese army shifted its attention from military conquest to regime building, first locally and then extending to the greater region. By the end of July 1937 it had sponsored a Beijing Local Peace Preservation Committee (Beiping difang zhi'an weichihui 北平地方治安維持會) to restore law and order.[11] Then a formal Municipal Government was established on August 6 to fill the political vacuum. Four months later, on December 14, 1937, the Provisional Government of the Republic of China (Zhonghua minguo linshi zhengfu 中華民國臨時政府), a collaborationist government, was formed.

By early 1938, the Japanese-occupied area of north China had expanded dramatically. With the Beijing-Tianjin metropolitan area at the center, it stretched from Manchuria in the northeast to Mongolia in the northwest, and spanned from Shanxi Province in the west to Shandong Province in the east. The occupation zone was divided into three client states. Rehe Province, immediately north of Beijing, was annexed to Manchukuo. Suiyuan and Chahar, two provinces northwest of Beijing, were ruled by the United Autonomous Government of the Mongolian Frontier (Mengjiang lianhe zizhi zhengfu 蒙疆聯合自治政府). Hebei, Henan, Shanxi, and Shandong Provinces, as well as Beijing and Tianjin, were put initially under the North China Political Council (Huabei zhengwu weiyuanhui 華北政務委員會) but were merged with Wang Jingwei's collaborationist regime in Nanjing in 1940 (see figs. 1 and 2).

10. Xi and Deng, *Beijing tongshi*, vol. 9, p. 75.
11. Boyle, *China and Japan at War*, pp. 84–85.

Figure 1. North China under Japanese Occupation, 1937–45. Source: R. Keith Schoppa, *Revolution and Its Past: Identities and Change in Modern Chinese History.* New York: Prentice Hall, 2002, p. 265.

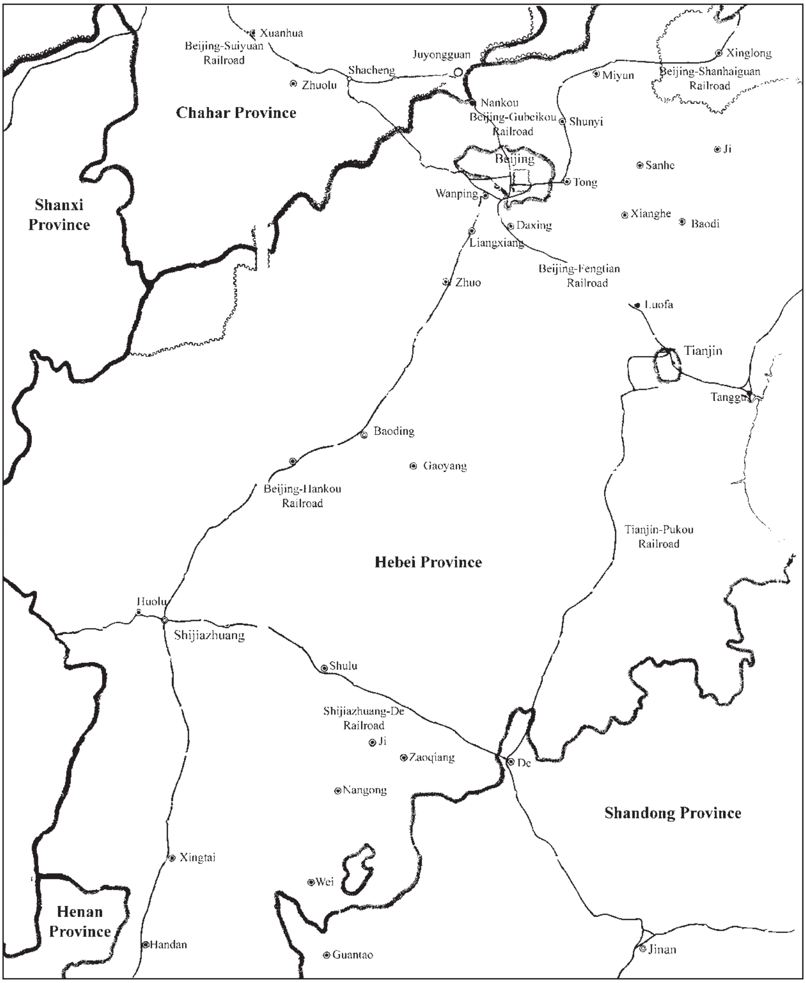

Figure 2. Selected Counties in North China. Map adapted from Zhang Qijun, ed., *Zhonghua minguo dituji* (Atlas of the Republic of China). Yangmingshan: Guofang yanjiuyuan, 1961, pp. 19–20.

The city remained under Japanese occupation until August 1945, when Japan was defeated and the GMD recovered Beijing. But in less than a year, China was thrown back into war. In the summer of 1946, peace talks between the GMD and the CCP collapsed. When war broke out, Beijing was a GMD stronghold; the CCP were tenacious but unable to mount attacks on major cities like Beijing. The situation changed after the CCP won a decisive victory in Manchuria in the winter of 1948. Communist soldiers encircled Beijing in late November and finally took over the city two months later, in January of 1949. On October 1, the People's Republic of China was founded.

These political events—the Japanese invasion and occupation, the GMD's recovery, and the CCP's victory—punctuate the historical narrative, offering conventional markers that allowed historians to separate the wartime period from both the preceding Nanjing Decade under GMD rule and socialist China under the CCP. Such periodization reflects the tendency, as well as convenience, of organizing historical timelines absolutely according to ruling regimes. By characterizing these political events as decisive, transformative, and progressive, historians can build a linear political history. Local scholars in Beijing in particular favor this political narrative. They tend to describe this wartime period as an exceptional era during which women and men suffered from extraordinary physical destruction, overwhelming political disillusionment, and tremendous social dislocation. Then, as the narrative goes, the wartime misery incubated the consciousness of resistance, which led to wartime heroism that united people in the CCP-inspired or -organized mass movement. This historiography helps historians locate Beijing and its people as active agents in the history of revolution against domestic and foreign enemies.[12]

Western scholars have made conscious efforts to move away from the revolutionary history framework. They regard such seamless transition from chaos to peace and prosperity, from subjugation to independence, more as an ideological construct used by CCP and official historians to pronounce the inevitable Communist victory. But they do, to varying degrees, agree that the wartime period radicalized women. In the

12. For examples of this Communist historiography, see Beijingshi zhengxie wenshi ziliao weiyuanhui, *Riwei tongzhi xia de Beiping*; and Xi and Deng, *Beijing tongshi,* vol. 9.

GMD-controlled cities, elite women activists came out for suffrage, worked in relief efforts, and participated in service teams.[13] Women workers, as Joshua Howard finds in his study of Chongqing's cotton mills, joined the efforts in "raising contributions for wounded soldiers or posting wall newspapers that articulated the anti-Japanese resistance message," which "had the unintended political effect of raising workers' sense of self-worth and their expectations of proper treatment." [14] The Communists, who fled cities in the late 1920s to escape the GMD's massacre, began to make their way back to urban labor politics. Emily Honig points out that the CCP "began trying to adapt organizational forms already existing among women workers, such as the sisterhoods and YWCA schools, to attract members." [15] Both the infiltration of existing women's organizations and growing contacts with workers allowed the CCP to educate women on party policies and mobilize them to join protests in the waning years of the Civil War. In the Communist-occupied base areas, women were at the forefront of the rural revolution; they were recruited into women's associations, study groups, and production units at the village level.[16] The CCP also sought women's support and rewarded their contributions to major social and economic programs such as land reform and marriage reform.[17] Summing up women's contributions to war efforts and the effect of war on the social place of and political discourse about women, Diana Lary concludes:

> War changed the gender balance in Chinese society. Many women had to learn to cope on their own and to step into roles that previously would have been performed by their fathers or husbands. Their forced independence started to change patterns of dependency and to give women opportunities to liberate themselves.[18]

For this wartime period, the political events described above are impressive, even striking, and in some respects absolutely transformative.

13. Edwards, *Gender, Politics, and Democracy*; Danke Li, *Echoes of Chongqing*; Ferlanti, "The New Life Movement in Jiangxi Province;" and Zurndorfer, "Wartime Refugee Relief."
14. Howard, "The Politicization of Women Workers at War," p. 1922.
15. Honig, *Sisters and Strangers*, p. 225. Also see Perry, *Shanghai on Strike*.
16. Johnson, *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China*, p. 64.
17. Ibid, pp. 63–89.
18. Lary, *The Chinese People at War*, p. 6.

And yet, this narrative of awakening and progress is not the only possible organizational framework through which to interpret this period; moreover, the political events were not as pervasively influential and decisively transformative as many would like to think and predict. In Beijing, lower-class women's lives were often marked not by change and progress associated with political events, but rather as part of a repeating cycle of crisis and survival.

In the first half of the twentieth century, political turmoil periodically upset the lives of Beijing residents. In 1900, the Boxer uprising had devoured the city, and international powers invaded. A few years later, in 1911, the Qing dynasty collapsed and the region fell under the grip of a series of warlords who constantly jostled for more power and territory. Between 1926 and 1928, the GMD defeated warlord armies, drove them out of Beijing, and achieved a nominal national reunification. But then throughout the 1930s, the city and its people were living under the threat of Japanese military provocations and diplomatic blackmail, which was followed by the Japanese occupation and Civil War between the CCP and the GMD. When the Communists established the People's Municipal Government on January 1, 1949, it was the fifth regime that local people had witnessed in Beijing in a quarter of a century.

Political upheaval did not end with the CCP's victory in early 1949. The revolutionary government promised to revive the economy and improve the people's livelihood. For the first three years of the new rule, the CCP followed a moderate policy under Mao Zedong's theory of "New Democracy," which called for a cross-class alliance and support for private businesses and market operations. But in 1952, the government began a campaign for "socialist transformation" (*shehui zhuyi gaizao* 社會主義改造). The CCP's dictatorship replaced the coalition government, and the more doctrinaire socialist policies annihilated the city's private sector. This marked a significant turning point, and thus the chronological end of the period covered by this book. Even after that, however, Beijing residents continued to live with political instability and economic shortages: the infamous political campaigns of the Great Leap Forward from 1958 to 1961 and the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976 generated enormous confusion and chaos and even led to anarchy.

Economic crisis descended upon Beijing whenever the political situation became unstable. For example, the GMD's decision to move

its capital from Beijing to Nanjing in 1928 hit Beijing's local economy severely. The city suffered from a tremendous loss of government funding and "an exodus of bureaucrats and their families, who had formed the wealthier part of the Beijing population."[19] The recession of the 1930s was followed by food shortages and inflation in the 1940s, and then by the age of austerity under the CCP's rule. In this regard, the turmoil and hardship experienced in wartime Beijing was hardly unprecedented or atypical. Political violence and social crises seemed both chronic and evanescent in Beijing; and they constantly threatened to throw local residents into abject poverty and thus prompted people to develop a set of survival tactics in order to get by in hard times.

Survival Tactics

Li Yang Shi's case captures a brief, albeit revealing, period of wartime suffering. When she entered a business partnership with her neighbor Liu Fulai in 1943, the Japanese occupation of the city was in its sixth year, but to local residents, the end seemed nowhere in sight. Although political conditions remained relatively stable under the iron fist of Japanese rule, the economic situation was worsening by the day. As the wartime government transported resources to support military campaigns well beyond north China, Beijing residents suffered from acute food shortages and escalating inflation. On July 24, in a rather desperate attempt to cope with the ever-growing food shortage, the Municipal Government began to introduce to residents a new kind of food substitute called "mixed flour" (*hunhe mian* 混合面), a mixture of wheat husks, bean cake, corn cover, grounded coarse grain, and even dust.[20] Before the new program took effect, unsanitary ingredients added to the mixed flour caused a major cholera outbreak in the western part of Beijing in August. To contain the public health crisis, officials had to shut down the communication between the industrial district in the western suburb and the rest of the city for weeks.[21] By the end of August, the

19. Madeleine Yue Dong, *Republican Beijing*, p. 106.
20. Bai Baohua, "Jugong, hunhemian, 'xiantong xietie,'" pp. 118–20.
21. Beijingshi shehui kexueyuan lishi yanjiusuo, *Beijing lishi jinian*, pp. 345–46.

price of all major food items spiked: wheat flour increased by 45 percent, millet by 39 percent, and corn flour by 12 percent.[22] Six months later, in February 1944 when Li Yang Shi was arrested after running away from home, the price went up again, 25 percent for wheat flour, 50 percent for millet, and 47 percent for corn flour.[23]

Li Yang Shi and other women tried various tactics to overcome these great odds, and their choices lay rooted in a tangible urban environment. Most of them lived in the "walled city" (*chengqu* 城區), which comprised a square Inner City (*neicheng* 內城) divided into seven districts and an adjacent rectangular Outer City (*waicheng* 外城) with five districts (see fig. 3). The towering wall, which was originally built in the late Ming dynasty (1368–1644) to defend the imperial capital from Mongol nomads' raids, still stood after dynastic governments had fallen. It might have been awe-inspiring to visitors and offered residents some sense of security, but it rendered the walled city a gigantic enclosure and contributed to an "involuting" process that William Rowe observes in nineteenth-century Hankou, where the city "grew upon itself."[24] According to official census figures, the city became home to approximately 70 percent of the population of Beijing Municipality by 1935, and the number of residents grew by 37 percent in 18 years, from 811,566 in 1917 to 1,113,966 in 1935.[25]

The natural demographic growth over centuries and the sustained migration that began in the early nineteenth century, especially the influx of the rural laboring class since the beginning of the twentieth century, not only made Beijing a densely populated place but also gave rise to tenements and slums within and immediately adjacent to the city walls. Existing homes were subdivided, and shoddy structures were erected to accommodate newcomers. The process gradually transformed the city skyline into a patchwork of tenements standing alongside imperial landmarks, office buildings, commercial facilities, and well-maintained residences. A stroll through the city would give a lively and fascinating view of the contrast between two opposing but interlocking worlds—the well-off area with decent housing and the run-down area of slums and tenements. To lower-class women, both

22. BPSJ, J211-1-4, "Beijing pifa wujia zhishu diaochabiao" [Wholesale price index in Beijing], 1943–44.
23. Ibid.
24. Rowe, *Hankow*: *Conflict and Community*, p. 5.
25. Han Guanghui, *Beijing lishi renkou dili*, p. 131.

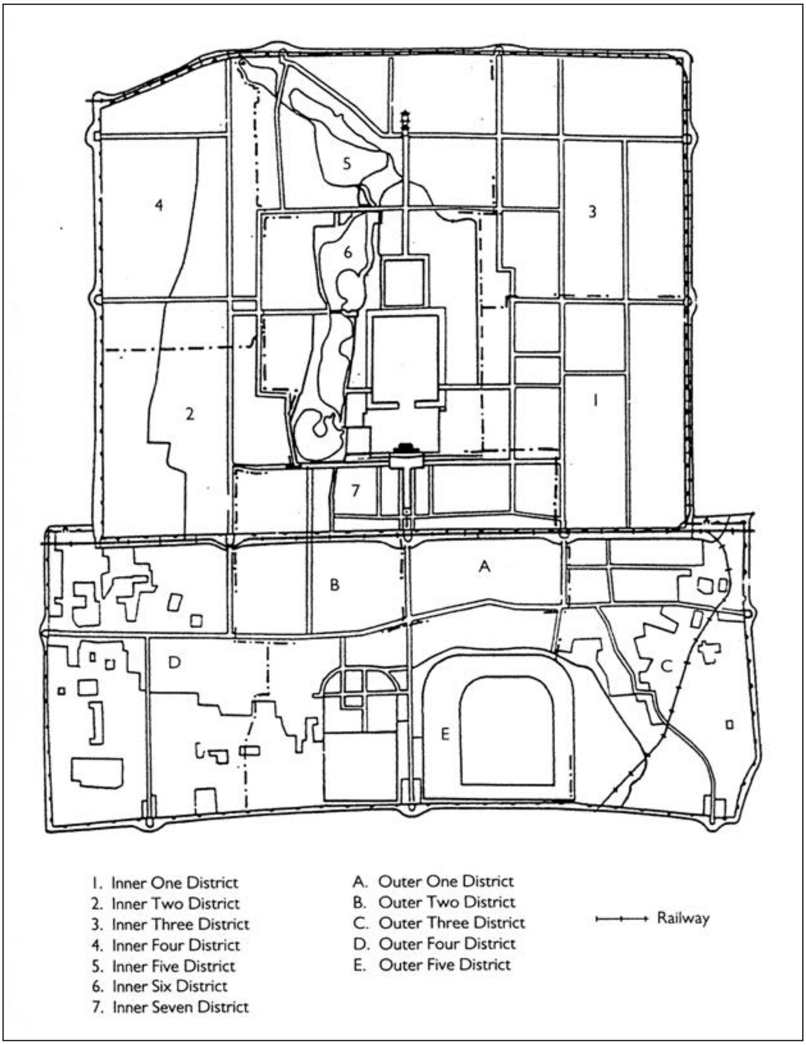

FIGURE 3. Districts of Beijing, 1937–49. Reproduced by permission from Madeleine Yue Dong, *Republican Beijing: The City and Its Histories*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003, p. 45.

those born in Beijing and those newly arrived, urban life was synonymous with the experience of living in tenements. Some established a nuclear family, living with a husband and sometimes with children. Others stayed with the extended families they had married into; but such residential choice represented less an aspiration to live up to the traditional, multi-generation-family-under-one-roof ideal than an act of pragmatism, since doing so allowed all members of the family to pool their resources together to achieve subsistence.

To women, the city space was also gender defined. The city remained a male-dominated world, as men outnumbered women considerably throughout the first half of the twentieth century. For example, there were 149 males to every 100 females citywide, and 140 males to every 100 females in the Inner-2 District where Li Yang Shi lived.[26] Men demonstrated and reinforced their public visibility simply by walking and working on the street: enforcing laws, directing traffic, attending customers, pulling rickshaws, transporting night soil, or making all sorts of trouble. By contrast, off the main streets and deep in the alleyways, women emerged as a crucial force in defining the social fabric and domestic rhythm of the tenement neighborhood.

It was in such neighborhoods where women spent most, if not all, of their time. The cramped living conditions forced women to spread their domestic life onto public space in the courtyards and alleyways, which transformed the neighborhood into a multi-functional place that supported a spectrum of economic opportunities, social activities, and emotional bonds. At one end of the spectrum women could turn their homes into handicraft workshops by weaving, spinning, knitting, and making shoe soles, matchboxes, paper flowers, rugs, and other items. Home and work sites were merged into a single space, as family time became flexible to allow women to accommodate work duties. At the other end of the spectrum, women might need to engage in crimes such as human trafficking and prostitution from time to time, to cope with a sudden family budget crisis. Between these two ends were various forms of neighborhood contacts, financial connections, and sexual liaisons that defined everyday neighborly interactions.

26. ZQ 12-2-273, Beijingshi zhengfu gong'anju (Beijing Municipal Police Department), "Weijing renshu ji zuiming tongjibiao" [Statistic of criminal offenses and offenders], 1943.

Criminal case files reveal that women appropriated urban economic, social, and moral geography in their efforts to solve tough problems in their lives. How could one secure a livelihood when family support was absent and income was unavailable? How were women to network and develop social bonds when they were not associated with formal institutions such as schools, factories, civic organizations, or political parties? What opportunities were available beyond the physical parameters of home, neighborhood, and city? How did women utilize and manipulate urban spaces for their individual needs while coping with the state's stringent policies? Their choices and actions reveal the effects of war and occupation, political instability, and economic crisis on individual lives, marriages, and families in wartime Beijing's lower-class neighborhoods.

Following the reality of women's struggles, the book is organized into three sections, each of which consists of two chapters and introduces key resources—such as the informal economy, flexible patterns of work, neighborhood social networks, and the fluidity of marriage contracts and geographic mobility—that helped lower-class women pull themselves out of violence and misery.

Part I, Precarious Livelihoods, centers on women's lives in the city and their efforts to find work or secure family support in order to maintain a living. Chapter 1 situates women's subsistence and survival tactics in early twentieth-century Beijing's "dual economy," which was characterized by a low level of industrialization and high commercialization. The urban industrial sector was minimal, and thus formal job opportunities were limited for women. However, the city's strategic position in the regional economic system made it a major hub of trade and commerce.[27] The exchange of all kinds of goods and services not only sustained the local economy, but also created an economic gray zone in which everything from cooking utensils to human bodies had a potential trade value, and every service from mending clothing to sex could incur some cash payment. Criminal case files indicate that women turned to various types of temporary jobs as a source of supplementary income for their cash-strapped families. They eked out a living within this murky gray zone. Chapter 2 focuses on lower-class women's claims to spousal support and their configuration of the roles of wife

27. Madeleine Yue Dong, *Republican Beijing*, p. 105.

and husband in economic terms. Economic hardship reinforced the hierarchical pattern of household authority that designated the man as the provider and the woman as the dependent. Runaway wives in war-torn Beijing made use of this hierarchical framework to justify their desertion to the court; they blamed men for not fulfilling their role as the family's breadwinner. In other words, the choice to invoke the traditional language of hierarchy and reciprocity was tactical, because the culturally shared expectations of marriage offered women a rhetorical weapon to justify their transgressive behavior.

Part II, Among Neighbors, explores the neighborhoods and home spaces within which women moved and lived, as well as the informal networks that arose to help women cope with myriad challenges in their daily lives. Chapter 3 studies women's survival tactics in relation to the social fabric of their tenement neighborhoods. Women's forays into crime highlight a number of disturbing elements of the tenement life that were often cause for concern among social reformers and law enforcement officials. These neighborhoods were cramped, raucous, and filthy places that overrode distinctions between public and private, between family members and neighbors. The living conditions were uncomfortable, if not intolerable, but the real crushing poverty, coupled with a deep sense of financial insecurity, left tenement dwellers with no better alternatives. A family's misery was exposed to the watchful eyes of neighbors; neighborly contact might lead to out-of-wedlock relationships and criminal schemes. Despite these inconveniences and troublesome activities, criminal case files bring to light how insider-women themselves made sense of their neighborhood and neighbors. They found the neighborhood space more supportive than disruptive to their livelihood. Proximity to one's neighbors and their watchful eyes allowed a large and resilient support system to be formed that offered women financial alternatives and emotional relief. Frequent neighborhood contacts helped to grow a diverse range of homosocial and heterosexual relationships, most of which, as chapter 4 argues, would challenge the state-sanctioned marriage institution and the social reformers' moral guidelines. Women's testimonies show that many of them entered new marital relationships after running away from home. In the process, practices such as neighbor-turned-matchmaker, customary rites, and a well-attended celebration in the neighborhood context substituted the state's requirement and legal definition of

married status with an informal recognition from one's community. Such fluid patterns of marriage helped women cope with downturns in their material and emotional lives. It is important to note that the neighborhood network, driven largely by women's individual circumstances and objectives, remained personalized and individualized. It did not ferment any political movement, nor did it foster class solidarity or militancy. But it was an important resource for lower-class women to shelter themselves from the regiments of the state and the economic turmoil in this period.

Part III, On the Move, traces women's journeys within and outside of the city. Chapter 5 examines the geographic mobility necessitated by women's struggles to survive. It shows that modern forms of transport, especially passenger trains, offered women fast and relatively reliable ways to travel over long distances, and were less exhausting than traveling on foot. However, women's mobility was intertwined with their personal lives and with the illegal activities that offered them occasional financial support. Some women traded food, textiles, and other goods on the black market; others were involved in the illegal buying and selling of children and destitute women. These illegal transactions expanded the informal economy from a local dealing to a regional enterprise, which allowed some women to maintain a precarious livelihood even as they traveled within and outside of Beijing. Chapter 6 illustrates that women's mobility raised moral concerns and oftentimes broke the law. Although social and legal reforms in China in the early twentieth century endorsed women's appearance in public, law enforcement officials kept a vigilant watch on women in public and would punish those whose conduct threatened the social and domestic order. Successive regimes drew on the philosophical, institutional, and experiential bequests of China's imperial past and Western (as well as Japanese) examples; they instituted the multi-layered control system in early twentieth-century Beijing to keep track of women's movement across neighborhoods, city districts, and regions. The obstacles encountered during the wartime policing of trade and mobility became a driving motivation for the government to create a more centralized, coordinated, and everyday policing state.

An examination of lower-class women's survival tactics shows both the vulnerability and resilience of their lives in wartime Beijing. Women scrambled to support themselves. Some worked sporadically for local

handicraft employers; others worked multiple small jobs to provide for their families in times of hardship. And because all of these forms of work were temporary and low paid, they were ultimately less important to a woman's survival than marital or family support. To many women, poverty ensued from a sudden loss of access to a male wage-earner. In this harsh economy, widowhood was virtually synonymous with being impoverished. When all other sources of support failed, women had to exchange sexual and reproductive labor on the market by means of marriage, concubinage, cohabitation, and seasonal prostitution. In search of work, a stable relationship, or a combination of both that could provide them with a level of financial security and psychological comfort, women found and lost jobs, started and ended relationships, moved around, committed crimes, and faced punishments. Their vivid testimonies allow us to place these individual instances of economic hardship and desperate choices in the large context of the city's massive poverty and the unmitigated economic crisis from pre-war depression to wartime inflation. I argue that women's survival tactics not only represent practical skills and knowledge of the city, but also reveal a perception of government, a notion of marriage and the family, legal culture, gender roles, and even language for women to make sense of their struggles on the margins of society and economy. These survival tactics facilitated an informal economy, as well as a sub-social and moral system that empowered lower-class women in their day-to-day negotiations within the modern state's rhetorical, administrative, and legislative framework.

Women on the Run, Police on the Beat

Three regimes successively ruled Beijing from 1937 to 1949: the Chinese collaborationist regime installed by the Japanese, the GMD government, and the CCP government that defeated the GMD in the Civil War. Each regime strove for political power and ideological supremacy by portraying itself as the antithesis or the enemy of its predecessors. Yet, beneath the surface hostility expressed in their propaganda, these wartime states were performing similar administrative duties: allocating food and other daily necessities, policing streets and transportation facilities,

monitoring demographic trends, documenting life-cycle events from birth to death, and enforcing laws to adjudicate social strife and domestic disputes. They shared common methods, goals, and even used the same personnel in their respective efforts to rebuild the urban social order and redefine womanhood. It was at the street and neighborhood level that various programs of urban control and initiatives of social reform brought government agencies into close contact with women's survival tactics. Let us go back to Li Yang Shi's story for some examples of how this played out.

Judge Duan Zhiping presided over Li Yang Shi's trial. He was born in 1906 in Fangshan County in Hebei Province, and at the age of twenty-one he attended the Chaoyang Law School in Beijing, well known for its reputation as a "mainstay of the judiciary."[28] He graduated in 1931. After two years of practical training, he began working at the Zhengding County Court in Hebei Province in 1933. The Japanese invasion in 1937 temporarily disrupted his judicial career, and during the first four years of the Japanese occupation he did not hold any government post. But in 1941, Duan accepted an appointment as a judge at the district court of the Japanese-controlled city of Qingdao in Shandong Province. Then, after serving a temporary term as alternate judge at the Hebei Provincial Supreme Court, he was transferred to the Beijing District Court.[29] Most of Duan's junior colleagues at Beijing District Court shared a similar career path. They went to college in the late 1920s, entered into public service by working for the GMD government, and continued their careers under the puppet regime. Some senior judges in the Beijing District Court served all three regimes. Eleven out of twenty-six judges in the Beijing District Court who served in 1943 had started their careers before the Japanese invasion.[30]

The court administrative archives do not explain what motivated Judge Duan and his colleagues to resume their careers after 1937, or what their views of Sino-Japanese collaboration might have been. For a long time, historiography had "banish[ed] them into the netherworld of

28. Gillespie and Chen, *Legal Reform in China and Vietnam*, p. 277.
29. BPDFFY, J65-3-339, "Jianli: Duan Zhiping" [Resume: Duan Zhiping], 1943.
30. BPDFFY, J65-3-161, "Beiping difang fayuan 1943 nian disan jidu banshi renyuan xueli" [Educational credentials of judicial officials at the Beijing District Court during the third quarter of 1943], 1943.

hanjian traitors,"[31] but in a recent work, Timothy Brook has attempted to examine their intentions by looking beyond a moralistic framework. Brook argues that collaborator-officials, with the exception of a few staunch supporters who worked enthusiastically with the Japanese occupiers, very likely collaborated with the enemy because it was "a more realistic survival strategy."[32] I further argue that the careers of these "turncoat officials" were made resilient across regimes by technical factors as well. Beijing's modern legal structure (its laws, court system, and the training of judicial officials) was established with substantial help from Japanese advisors in the 1910s and 1920s.[33] The criminal and civil codes promulgated by the GMD government in the early 1930s remained in force during wartime. The Japanese did not interfere with criminal investigations and court hearings unless the case in question was politically sensitive. To this extent, judicial officials like Judge Duan were able to work much as they would have done under the GMD regime.

Besides the justice system, many elements of urban administration and ideological control in the 1940s had already been developed before the Japanese invasion. The GMD Municipal Government in the 1920s and 30s launched the institutional reform that aimed to build an engaged and hands-on state to effectively govern a society that had become increasingly mobile and diverse. Officials put in place a series of measures to register marriages, issue standardized marriage certificates, regulate hotel service and the operation of long-distance bus companies, and enforce laws at public spaces such as parks, movie theaters, temple fairs, and brothels. The most crucial program was *hukou*, the household registration, which was designed to give officials the most up-to-date information on the neighborhood and residents under their watch. The Japanese and their collaborators inherited and perfected all these programs during the war. Moreover, the transformation of the

31. Brook, *Collaboration*, p. 13.

32. Ibid, pp. 12–13. Also see Barrett and Shyu, *Chinese Collaboration with Japan*; and Pan, *Jiangsu riwei jiceng zhengquan yanjiu*. Poshek Fu's work on literary collaborators in occupied Shanghai is also instructive on this point; see Fu, *Passivity, Resistance, and Collaboration*.

33. Reynolds, *China, 1898–1912*. For the "Japanese connections" in the reform of Chinese legal structure, see also Shu, *Jindai Zhongguo liuxue shi*; Shang, *Liuri xuesheng yu Qingmo xinzheng*; and Li Chunlei, *Zhongguo jindai xingshi susong zhidu biange yanjiu*.

city's spatial organization continued as the collaborationist regime kept financing road construction and opening new industrial districts in Beijing.[34]

About eighteen months after Liu Fulai's trial, Japan was defeated and the GMD recovered Beijing in August 1945. Without personnel records from the Beijing District Court, we do not know how this change of regime affected Judge Duan's career; but we do know that about 40 percent of municipal bureaucrats kept their posts and worked alongside new GMD appointees.[35] When the CCP came to power, they announced plans to remove personnel who had served under previous regimes. Under this new policy, officials who survived previous changes of government found the political environment under the revolutionary order unaccommodating; their professional association with past governments and their social connections rendered them politically anathema. In less than half a year, most of them were dismissed, reprimanded, or sent to special schools for thought reform.[36]

Although CCP rulers were taking punitive measures against former government employees, they quietly kept several governing structures that the previous regimes had installed. For example, the *hukou* system continued to operate. It was the building block for the institutional structure of social management in the socialist state. The state-run food distribution and marriage registration systems also remained. Perhaps the most obvious case of this type of institutional continuity is the

34. David Buck's study of urban construction in Changchun, capital of the Japanese client state Manchukuo, reveals a similar emphasis on the city's modern appearance—streets, utility infrastructure, and grand buildings—by Japanese administrators. Buck, "Railway City and National Capital," p. 82.

35. BPSZF, J1-7-417, "Benfu ji geju liuyong, yaoyong, ji houfang lai ping renyuan tongjibiao" [Employees of the Beijing Municipal Government and its various departments], 1946.

36. By May 1, 1949, the CCP Municipal Government reappointed 3,155 GMD civil servants (64.54 percent), sent 540 to training classes for short-term political study, sent 314 to three Communist-run universities for long-term re-education, dismissed 556, and reprimanded 77. From "Zhonggong Beijing shiwei guanyu jiu renyuan chuli yuanze xiang Zhongyang, Huabeiju de qingshi baogao" [The Beijing Municipal Committee's request for instructions from the Central Committee and the North China Bureau regarding the principles of disposing old personnel], in Beijingshi dang'anguan and Zhonggong Beijing shiwei dangshi yanjiushi, *Beijingshi zhongyao wenxian xuanbian*, pp. 222–23.

retention of the mutual surveillance system (*baojia* 保甲). The CCP had publicly attacked it as a system of repression and vowed to abolish it, but cadres worked conscientiously to maintain its structure and to incorporate it into the new neighborhood committee (*juweihui* 居委會) system; this became the foundation of community-based grassroots control and mobilization after 1949.

A shared menu of administrative programs helped to smooth the transition across three changes in regime in 1937, 1945, and 1949. Continuity helped to ease the process for women to comprehend and adjust to political change. Women were accustomed to living under government surveillance that subjected major events in their lives (e.g., birth, marriage, and death) and everyday personal activities (e.g., moving, travel, and consumption of food and other necessities) to state scrutiny and allocation. Women were also familiar with top-down social engineering efforts that called upon them to spend less, save more, reform their behavior, and devote productive labor to the national cause. The successive governments urged women to make sacrifices and contributions to reform and revolution, which in the official rhetoric would legitimate women's place in public life.

Although they shared the same goals and used the same kinds of programs to mold women and control urban society, different regimes had different degrees of success in their administrative and social engineering projects. The wartime women's movements in the Japanese-occupied and GMD-controlled areas were limited in scale and followed a highly bureaucratic path through party structures, administrative divisions, and work units.[37] Lower-class women in Beijing were absent from city politics and were generally excluded from collective action. Women had a chance to enter into public affairs after 1949, when the CCP took over, and those from the lower echelons of society were especially encouraged to play a more active role, but they first had to become "women cadres" and "women activists" or "labor models" if they wanted to play any meaningful part in public affairs.[38] Their lives were increasingly directed by

37. Ferlanti, "The New Life Movement in Jiangxi Province."
38. For the CCP's promotion of labor models and political activists as new female icons in the emerging socialist political culture, see Tina Mai Chen, "Female Icons, Feminist Iconography?" For women's participation in Communist grassroots mobilizations, see Wang Zheng, "Gender and Maoist Urban Reorganization"; and Zhao Ma, "Female Workers." Gail Hershatter's book, *The Gender of Memory*, offers

party-state policies and their activities integrated with the greater mass mobilization, but they were not given increased latitude to define their life course on their own terms. The main aim of the women's movement after 1949 was to promote the state as both a tireless social regulator and an effective driving force for revolution.

The study of the way the state operated at the grassroots level shows that all three wartime regimes in Beijing worked aggressively on changing the city's physical layout, political structure, and social and cultural configuration. Such continuity in the visions and practices in urban governance compels us to reconceive wartime history. Sandwiched between two powerful and opposing regimes, the wartime period from 1937 to 1949 falls into a historical black hole of not being precisely either and has therefore tended to be occluded. This book reveals how a consistent vision of a modern city and urban governance overrode political differences and ideological rivalries in this period between and beyond the GMD regime and the People's Republic of China.

Conceiving Womanhood

However useful survival tactics were for lower-class women to cope with economic and personal difficulties, they often deviated from what twentieth-century political and social leaders prescribed as ideal womanhood. Women—their bodies and behavior, their education and upbringing, their work patterns and living arrangements, their marriage and family relations, their pleasure and desire, their mobility, and their sense of their own place within the larger society—had come under reformist and revolutionary scrutiny in China ever since the late Qing reform movement and culminating in the Communist revolution. What political and social reformers found was a great divide between lofty ideals and the reality of lower-class women's everyday struggles, and it often appalled, disappointed, and motivated them.

For example, in his classic social survey of Beijing in the 1920s, American sociologist Sidney Gamble (1890–1968) emphasized the gulf

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a comprehensive overview of rural women's experience and memory of revolutionary campaigns in socialist China.

between the drastic urban development that had transformed the city's physical outline and administrative structure on the one hand and Chinese women's restricted and immobile lives on the other. He wrote, "Chinese custom is quite strict in insisting that no women travel, unless accompanied by their families." He continued, "single women do not come to Peking in any large numbers," because "political life is not open to them" and "they find little if any place in industry, and their educational opportunities are much more limited than those of the men." Moreover, married women stayed with the marital family back at home "where she can help with the work of the house, or if in the country, with the work on the farm."[39] Women's "immobile" life is just one element that Gamble and his sociologist colleagues in the 1920s encountered when they walked along the winding lanes of the city's tenement neighborhoods.

Seeking to explain Chinese women's problems, Gamble blamed traditional gender norms that sustained a strict separation of sexes and kept women inside family compounds away from public encounters. The lack of political and socioeconomic opportunities for Chinese women further prevented them from living an independent, productive, politically conscious, and emotionally fulfilling life. The ultimate solution to end women's subjugation was through education, factory employment, political activism, and social gospel messages. This body of sociological research work produced by Gamble and his colleagues and students from the 1920s to the early 1940s is noteworthy in terms of the institutional support these researchers obtained, the solid empirical base they built, their explicit intention to use their results to aid municipal policymakers, and their unapologetic borrowing of theoretical frameworks derived from the Western experience.[40] To them, lower-class women's struggles in Beijing did not challenge but reaffirmed and exemplified the characterization of the alleged backward and pathetic Chinese nationhood and womanhood. Terms such as "dangerous women," "immoral women," "idle women," and "backward women" proliferated both in research works and beyond the research community in social

39. Gamble, *Peking*, p. 102.
40. Madeleine Yue Dong, *Republican Beijing*, pp. 212–14; Chiang, *Social Engineering*, pp. 34–35 and 57. For the most thorough and elaborate studies on this subject, see Lam, *A Passion for Facts*; and Huang Xingtao and Xia Mingfang, *Qingmo minguo shehui diaocha*.

surveys, police reports, newspaper commentaries, official propaganda, and party documents. It was a way to criticize women for failing to live up to the reformist expectations and to deplore government for failing to lift women out of ignorance and poverty.

The sociologists' work built a potent and enduring analytical framework that shaped the political and social agenda of Chinese women's movements, as well as the agenda of urban reform and revolution, in the twentieth century. The objectives were for women to become independent and for China to transform into a cohesive modern nation-state and society. Urban space became an experimental ground in which political and social leaders carried out their missions of encouraging productivity, restoring social order, reforming gender relations, and constructing a cohesive social body. In this regard, women and the city became part of a constellation that captured reformers' gaze and provided them an arena to articulate, manufacture, and exhibit the new meaning of womanhood and cityhood.

Urban reformers in early twentieth-century Beijing tore down city walls and paved roads to facilitate traffic, cleaned sewage and removed garbage to improve sanitation, and opened new public spaces (such as parks) to encourage people to practice political activism and explore cultural activities.[41] Then, to remake women's bodies to fit the new city space, social activists joined forces with police and medical professionals to unbind women's feet, cultivate hygiene habits, and quarantine disease.[42] Reformers also rewrote social policies and law codes to push for a new conception of women as free and independent agents capable of conscious autonomous action.[43] This new vision of womanhood claimed to offer women possibilities to explore a public and active life;

41. Shi, *Zouxiang jindaihua de Beijingcheng*; Shi, "From Imperial Gardens to Public Parks"; Madeleine Yue Dong, *Republican Beijing*; Dryburgh, "National City, Human City"; and Xu, "Policing Civility on the Streets."

42. For the anti-footbinding movement in modern China, see Ko, *Cinderella's Sisters*, chaps. 1 and 2. For urban hygiene campaigns and disease control practices, see Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*, chaps 10–12; Rogaski, *Hygienic Modernity*; and Yang Nianqun, *Zaizao "bingren."*

43. For reformist writings about women's liberation, see Wang Zheng, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment*. For legislative construction of the principle of gender equality, see Bernhardt, "Women and the Law"; Glosser, *Chinese Visions of Family and State*; Luo Meijun (Mechthild Leutner), *Beijing de shengyu, hunyin he sangzang*; and Zhao Ma, "Wayward Daughters."

however, it also established social, moral, and legal boundaries that regulated women's appearance in public and domestic roles. When they crossed certain boundaries, their morality would be criticized, and they even became targets of discipline and punishment. Paul Bailey and Weikun Cheng have shown that women's undesirable behavior and the potential dangers they faced in a heterosocial environment fueled discussions over their virtue and morality.[44] Social and moral reforms were launched to remake the city's physical outline and cultural milieu on the one hand, and to remold women's bodies, minds, and spirit on the other.

Since the late 1980s, historians (including Emily Honig, Gail Hershatter, Christina Gilmartin, Wang Zheng, Joan Judge, Weikun Cheng, and many others) have begun shifting the focus of their research from the reformist vision and revolutionary movement itself to uncover women's personal experiences within the context of these monumental changes in modern China.[45] These innovative works show that women played a crucial role in the reforms and revolutions that recast modern Chinese cities in the twentieth century. Their negotiations, alliances, and conflicts with personal politics in light of the impersonal social and economic changes greatly enriched and re-invented the meaning of womanhood. By putting gender at the center of the analysis, these historians have successfully rewritten the male-centered political narrative of twentieth-century Chinese history.

Building on the scholarship of women's history in the past two decades, I argue that both the construction of womanhood and the configuration of urban space were gender defined and class specific. Elite women and men saw the reform campaign as much a referendum on imperial womanhood as a mass education movement. By repudiating traditional ideals and practices such as the chastity cult, foot-binding, and gender segregation, elite reformers vowed to teach lower-class women to live and thrive in the renewed urban environment through roles of productive laborers, wage earners, independent domestic partners, civic-minded citizens, and law-abiding residents. When reform

44. Bailey, "'Women Behaving Badly'"; Cheng, *City of Working Women*.
45. Honig, *Sisters and Strangers*; Gilmartin, *Engendering the Chinese Revolution*; Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*; Wang Zheng, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment*; Judge, *The Precious Raft of History*; Cheng, *City of Working Women*.

gave way to revolution, party leaders accepted the sociologists' and reformers' conclusions and proclaimed that the revolution would ultimately bring lower-class women new lives characterized by knowledge, political participation, and equality in economic and social affairs. It was in this heightened reform-revolution discourse that lower-class women in wartime Beijing's slums and tenements appeared to be hopelessly backward, unapologetically unenlightened, tragically locked in the vicious cycle of poverty and ignorance, and thus desperately waiting to be liberated by political and social leaders from above and outside.

In contrast to this viewpoint, my book attempts to understand lower-class women's experience from the bottom up and inside out. I show that, for example, while the tenement neighborhood was congested and unsanitary, for women it was also a crucial place that allowed them to access regional systems of information, service, and market supply and demand. Women's domestic routines often extended out into shared courtyards and onto the streets, which blurred the distinction between private and public spaces. Although neighborly contacts invaded one's privacy, they brought to women legal and illegal means of support faster than any social relief agency. Their marriages and families were built on the hierarchal roles of provider husband and dependent wife, but the sustained economic crisis had eroded the strength of domestic institutions. Because it tied a man's domestic authority to his ability to provide financial support, female dependency assured lower-class women a kind of moral protection by putting enormous pressure on a husband to fulfill his role. After all, lower-class women perceived, utilized, and modified the urban social and moral landscape on their own terms.

The Everydayness of Legal Records

Men, especially powerful men, had many ways to let their voices be heard and put their words into action in early twentieth-century Beijing. They drew plans to build industrial districts in an effort to revitalize the moribund economy and capitalize on women's productive labor. They passed laws and changed regulations, claiming to promote gender equality at home and in public. They surveyed the neighborhoods to find cures for what they deemed as social ills. They also policed the streets to punish

promiscuous behavior and criminal conduct. These (elite) male voices so far have allowed historians to understand the changing urban structures and their impact on women. Elite women participated in social reforms and cultural debates as well by means of writing, publishing, teaching in the classroom, and protesting on the street. Lower-class women, in contrast, seemed to have been living invisibly and silently in this male-dominated society.

My book argues that women like Li Yang Shi conceived the city not in words but with their feet, and we can trace their footprints by reading their testimonies preserved in legal proceedings. Cases like Li Yang Shi's illuminate that women in wartime Beijing wandered in shops, movie theaters, parks, temple fairs, workshops, hotels, railway stations, city gates, congested urban neighborhoods, and remote villages. These footprints mark women's frustration with relationships they were in, their efforts to leave the past behind, and their hope for a new life, to name just a few examples. As women were moving around, the law enforcement and criminal justice systems in wartime Beijing played an active role in handling cases involving runaway women. Police officers investigated allegations of abduction, bigamy, and adultery. They patrolled train stations, long-distance bus terminals, and city gates in search of suspicious elements, especially women and men who were traveling without proper documentation. They also conducted periodic raids of wayside inns to arrest couples who failed to prove their relationship. Women and men arrested typically were detained in the police precinct office where a preliminary interrogation could be held.

After gathering testimonies and physical evidence, the Police Department filed a concise investigation report and transferred the case to the procuracy at the Beijing District Court. Procurators held preliminary hearings to determine if there was sufficient evidence to hold the accused women and men for trial in criminal court. As the prosecution moved forward, the judge presided over trials, summoned witnesses, cross-examined testimonies and evidence, heard lawyers' statements, and then issued the sentence. In cases where the defendant decided to appeal, the Hebei Provincial High Court would review case files and issue the final sentence.[46] Legal proceedings document every step as

46. BPDFFY, J65-3-287, "Susong xuzhi" [Guidelines of litigation], December 21, 1935.

the case moved through the system of law enforcement and criminal justice, and a case record's length varies from one to several volumes, depending on the number of court sessions that were held.

Unlike the late imperial case files that *summarize* court investigations, the major portion of twentieth-century criminal case records is primarily composed of courtroom proceedings written in dialogue form that were *transcribed* during the cross-examination process.[47] Transcription was a new method to replace written depositions because summaries, as republican judicial officials argued, left too much room for subjective interpretation. The new strategy was designed to reduce the chances of a biased narration of events making its way into the court record. To be clear, women were under tremendous stress when they were interrogated and cross-examined in court. The stakes were high, and most would make every effort to either convince the judge of their innocence or shift the guilt onto other people. Women would have almost certainly twisted some facts to achieve their end. Furthermore, their testimonies were incomplete, revealing only those aspects of their lives deemed by judicial officials as essential to the court's investigation.

For example, in Li Yang Shi's case, besides her troubled marriage and her ill-fated affair, we know that the name she used before her marriage was Yang Yuzhen. She then adopted her husband Li Youxun's surname and began to call herself Li Yang Shi. We also know that Li Youxun requested that the prosecutor not press charges against Li Yang Shi and that he later even offered to withdraw the adultery charge against Liu Fulai; probably he did so to spare his wife the public shame and embarrassment of having had an extramarital affair and perhaps to win her affections back. On March 15, 1944, the court finally concluded its investigation into Li Yang Shi's case. It convicted the defendant, Liu Fulai, of "seducing away a married woman with her consent from her family and causing her to submit to an indecent act" (*yitu jianyin er heyou youpeiou zhi ren tuoli jiating* 意圖姦淫而和誘有配偶之人脫離家庭) and sentenced him to one year in prison.

There are still many unanswered questions, however. For example, was Li Yang Shi's marriage an arranged one? What was her family's

47. For a discussion of the features of late imperial legal case files, see Sommer, *Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China* pp. 17–22; and Theiss, *Disgraceful Matters*, pp. 3–7.

financial background? Had she been trained to do any work? What was her relationship with her husband like at the beginning of their marriage? Did she ever feel any affection for her husband? Did she go back to her husband after the trial? If not, what were the other options available to her? These things might have been just as important to our understanding of Li Yang Shi's daily life as other details, but we cannot answer these questions. Nevertheless, our inability to tie up all the loose ends is in fact not a problem, because my book does not seek to recapitulate an individual life story. Instead, it investigates fragments of several women's lives in an attempt to explore lower-class women's participation in the processes of reform and revolution. Criminal case files are more like what Gail Hershatter calls a "good-enough story," a story that "surprises and engenders thought, unspooling in different directions depending on which thread the listener picks up."[48] Social historians are accustomed to combing through fragmentary and uneven records to decipher deviant behaviors, examine lives on the social margins, and understand the informal economy. Studying the operation of clandestine commerce in the history of the United States, Peter Andreas emphasizes:

> Indeed, the very success of smuggling operations typically depends on not being seen or counted. Documentation therefore tends to be fragmentary and uneven, and it represents rough estimates at best. Readers should keep these inherent limitations in mind in the chapters that follow. In the end, I hope they will agree with me that it is better to tell the story with admittedly imperfect and incomplete data than to simply throw up one's hands and pretend that the world of smuggling doesn't exist because it cannot be precisely measured.[49]

In the same vein, women in wartime Beijing concealed, manipulated, overstated, or sensationalized their lives when testifying before the judge. Yet, it is these snapshots and fragments of everyday life that enable us to understand the world lower-class women inhabited in great depth; they allow us to appreciate the different social, economic, and moral options the underworld offered its citizens. It is through

48. Hershatter, *The Gender of Memory*, p. 3.
49. Andreas, *Smuggler Nation*, p. 1.

tracing women's experience recorded in case files, and through drawing extensively on oral testimony and listening carefully both to what those called to testify in court said and how their words resonated in official documents and in the everyday lives of lower-class women, that we come to understand their pain and pleasure, anxiety and hope, and ultimately their physical, social, and even mental world in wartime Beijing.

Lower-class women came to criminal court as plaintiffs, defendants, and witnesses;[50] but I will *not* suggest that most women in wartime Beijing took their domestic problems to court and resolved their personal troubles before the judge. Many of them made efforts to settle disputes either within the family or with the help of close friends and neighbors. Going to court or being involved in a criminal lawsuit represents a rather extraordinary (and abnormal) episode in a woman's life. If each case file recapitulates an extraordinary personal story in one particular historical moment in wartime Beijing, then to what extent can a collection of such stories tell us about the larger body of women in Beijing and about the broader history of the city and the war? Or simply put, how typical were women such as Li Yang Shi?

I do not choose to study Li Yang Shi because I think she is a typical woman in wartime Beijing; she comes to me and reveals fragments of her life to me. That being said, I am convinced that women like Li Yang Shi represented the statistical majority of the population throughout the early twentieth century. Sociologist Li Jinghan (1895–1986) once attempted to classify the quality of life for residents in 1920s Beijing in four categories—"extravagant" (*renyi shechi* 任意奢侈), "living in comfort" (*anle duri* 安樂度日), "just coping" (*jiangjiu duri* 將就度日), and "extreme poverty" (*qiong de yaoming* 窮的要命), defined by their level of income and material possessions. People categorized as "just coping" were those who were "able to feed and clothe themselves, not in need of charity, but who could not afford to participate in social

50. In her study of the divorce lawsuit in Qing and Republican China, Kathryn Bernhardt draws samples from civil case files of Beijing District Court in the early 1940s. She claims that "[t]he civil code had its greatest impact in the cities, where knowledge of the new law was more widespread and the new courts more easily accessible." In part because of the court system that was "relatively affordable and efficient," Bernhardt observes, "women initiated 77 percent of divorce suits in Beijing in 1942." Bernhardt, "Women and the Law."

activities or handle natural disasters and misfortunes"; and those in "extreme poverty" included seasonal beggars, soup kitchen patrons, and paupers.[51] Most of the women discussed in this book would have been grouped in one of these two categories. Li estimated that in Beijing during the late 1920s, these two categories constituted more than 73 percent of all households, and other early twentieth-century surveys found that between half and three-quarters of Beijing's population lived in dire poverty.[52] The disproportionately high poverty rate remained unchanged until the end of the wartime period. Mindful of these statistical numbers, we know that the circumstances that drove women to criminal action were certainly widespread phenomena in wartime Beijing. These extraordinary women and their survival tactics are a reflection of everyday life in an extraordinary time of war and occupation and in a society experiencing an extraordinary level of hardship and deprivation.

Contemporary urban administrators, social reformers, and university researchers were appalled by the shocking image of the social crisis when they walked past the tenement neighborhoods. As they sought to rebuild the city's social and moral order, lower-class women and the everyday practices associated with them carried new significance, as a depressing reminder of the city's rampant poverty, as a research subject feeding new sociological endeavors, as a staying call for charity missions, social reforms, and political revolution. However, the reformist visions and revolutionary narratives in any case afford only very limited opportunity for lower-class women to articulate in a formal setting their concerns about the way the urban environment was designed and constructed.[53] Women defined and utilized the city through survival tactics and preexisting customs and values in the local neighborhoods. Many women, like Li Yang Shi and those whose

51. Li Jinghan, "Beiping zuidi xiandu de shenghuo chengdu de taolun," p. 17.

52. Madeleine Yue Dong, *Republican Beijing*, p. 214.

53. According to an official survey, women made up only 11 percent (168 out of 1,350) of employees in the Municipal Government in 1946. (BPSZF, J1-7-417, "Benfu ji geju zhi guyuan xingbie tongjibiao" [Gender distribution of employees at the municipal government and departments], August 1946.) There is little or no evidence to suggest the active operation of women's associations in wartime Beijing. Other forms of collective action such as organized labor activities were extremely rare as well.

stories appear in criminal case files, ended up breaking laws, disrupting domestic order, threatening public security, and challenging moral rules. Their practices evaded, ignored, confronted, and even undermined the official formulation of new womanhood in relation to the shifting meaning and function of the city.

This is not the first time we see women engaging in the modification of urban space and redefining the duties of daughterhood, wifehood, and widowhood to serve their needs. Wang Zheng's work, for example, has shown that feminists in the 1920s put their liberal agenda of pursuing equal rights for women ahead of the political and economic revolution promoted by the GMD.[54] While feminist activists both before and during the war made a conscious decision to keep their voices and space free from state control, their lower-class sisters responded spontaneously to the state's regulatory, reformist, and revolutionary efforts, and they did so without institutional support and without pressing for institutional change. But simply by "doing" in their daily lives—working, gossiping, matchmaking, moving, smuggling, evading state control—lower-class women cultivated their own sense of women's social and gender roles. They made as much an impact on Beijing's social and moral landscape as the feminist activists. As they struggled to survive political turmoil and economic hardship, women became both the object of reform and revolution discourse and the subject of processes that transformed city, nation, and individual lives.

54. Wang Zheng, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment*.

PART I

Precarious Livelihoods

CHAPTER ONE

Working Women

Thirty-five-year-old Chen Ma Shi had been married to Chen Guofu, a cook eleven years her senior, for several years. The couple spent little time together, however, because Chen Guofu lived in his master's house, preparing meals for his family every day. Although he was rarely home, Chen Guofu supported his wife and their two children financially. This working and living arrangement seemingly worked well for the Chens. Over time, however, the monthly allowance from Chen Guofu dwindled, and therefore his family's living conditions gradually worsened. Exacerbating the situation was the Japanese occupation; by 1944, the seventh year of the occupation, the escalating inflation in Beijing pushed many families into destitution. To support her children and herself, Chen Ma Shi decided to find work. She first worked as a domestic servant and later picked up another job mending and washing clothes (*xizuo yifu* 洗作衣服). It was through her second job that she befriended Rong Xianzong, a twenty-nine-year-old police officer, who not only paid her to do his laundry but also helped her financially.[1]

Chen Ma Shi's relationship with Rong Xianzong strengthened from 1945 to 1946, and her husband Chen Guofu did not intervene, probably because he had been away from home and did not know of the affair. Or he may have turned a blind eye to the affair in order to ease his financial burden. In either case, the affair continued for more than a year, until mid-1946, when Chen Guofu decided to take action to stop it. On July 6, 1946, he left his master's house in the evening and reached his home at around nine o'clock. Standing on the doorstep, he noticed that the lights were off inside. He walked in cautiously and groped for the light. Under

1. BPDFFY, J65-13-833, Chen Ma Shi and Rong Xianzong, 1946.

the dim illumination, Chen Guofu made out that his wife was sitting on the bed with her pants loosened and Rong Xianzong was standing beside her half-naked. The two men fought, until police who patrolled the neighborhood arrived and arrested both of them, along with Chen Ma Shi. About three weeks later, on July 31, 1946, Chen Ma Shi and Rong Xianzong stood trial in the Beijing District Court for adultery.

First at the police precinct office and later at court, officers took down personal information for all three people, recording details such as their name, age, place of birth, current address, names of family members, and occupation (*zhiye* 職業).[2] The police report identified Chen Guofu as a cook, Rong Xianzong as a police officer, and Chen Ma Shi as "unemployed" (*wuye* 無業), despite the work she did washing and mending clothes. This was not a rare clerical error, but something that appeared quite often in criminal case files. Women who worked at the time of their lawsuits were in fact frequently identified as unemployed. The discrepancy between women's actual work patterns on the one hand, and the official definition and categorization of *zhiye* on the other, allows us to investigate how the meaning of women's work was defined and redefined through urban reform, legislation, and political mobilization in the early twentieth century. Such a discrepancy also allows us to explore how the discourse of women's work was expressed in laws, policies, political rhetoric, and, most importantly, women's everyday tactics.

The routine process of identifying and classifying a given person's employment during prosecution and in civil administration illustrates how administrators and reformers conceived the proper source of people's economic well-being as well as demonstrated their commitment to improving individual livelihood. Hoping to build a robust manufacturing sector, they viewed industrialization as the ultimate solution to the city's chronic revenue problem. Contemporary sociologists and social workers applauded the economic program and espoused the industrial vision too. Under such industrial cultural discourse, employment was defined as a regular paying job requiring skill and professional training. Moreover, employment, industrializa-

2. In some cases, questioning also included taking down information about one's education (*jiaoyu chengdu* 教育程度) and criminal record (*xingshi chufa* 刑事處罰).

tion, and municipal government were inextricably connected: employment was to stem from the modern economy, industrialization was to be the foundation of such an economy, and government intervened to manage and ensure the proper development of both. Employment had particular significance to women. In reformist rhetoric, it became the foundation of women's social and political independence, their personhood, without which women's liberation could never be achieved.

Things did not happen as envisioned, however. Early twentieth-century Beijing was not an industrial powerhouse. Women rarely had the opportunity to work in factories, tending to mechanical looms or making cigarettes, shoes, and matches. By one count, female workers constituted a very small fraction, less than 2.3 percent (20,234 out of 859,225), of the total population of women in Beijing in 1949; and the number of female industrial workers was even fewer, 2,322 in total.[3] Women faced a tougher job market not only because of impersonal forces such as war, foreign occupation, and a shattered local economy resulting from the regime change, but also because they were female and married. The unemployment rate was much higher among women than men. For example, women accounted for only 35.9 percent of the labor force (male and female combined) in 1933; but among the city's 418,705 unemployed residents, 55.5 percent were women. As many as 62 percent of women of working age were unemployed (in comparison to 28 percent among men).[4] The situation remained largely unchanged for the next decade. In a survey

3. BJFL, 84-2-4, "Beijingshi funü gejie renshu tongji" [Survey of women of different social groups in Beijing], 1949. The employment situation for women was improving in other cities during the same period of time. In Shanghai, for example, three-quarters of cotton mill workers in the 1930s were women. See Honig, *Sisters and Strangers*; Perry, *Shanghai on Strike*; Smith, *Revolution and the People in Russia and China*. In Tianjin, even though men still dominated the manufacturing sector, the female labor force made up 9.14 percent (in 1929), 39 percent (after 1937), and almost 50 percent (in 1947) of the cotton mill workforce. Hershatter, *The Workers of Tianjin*. Newly-emerged cities joined the industrial race. For example, at Shijiazhuang in north China, a new textile industry center was established around the 1920s. Increased investment (especially from the Japanese) and the closeness to raw materials contributed to the city's rapid growth from a rural town to a provincial industrial center within two decades. See Peng, "Yudahua." However, the presence of regional competitors diverted industrial investment away from Beijing and further decimated its hope for industrialization.
4. BPSJCJ, J181-1-371, "Renkou zhiye xibiebiao" (Occupation of the residents in the inner and outer districts of Beijing), 1933.

conducted by the Bureau of Social Affairs under the collaborationist government in 1944, in the Inner-2 District where Chen Ma Shi lived, the unemployment rate among women was 54 percent.[5] Noticeably, it was even harder for married women to find a full-time job. Most of them were preoccupied with domestic chores such as caring for children, cooking meals, cleaning, and attending to the sick. Local customs also dictated that only families in abject poverty would send their wives and daughters out to work, and this created and perpetuated a kind of social stigma despising and prohibiting married women from working outside of the home. Full-time employment, particularly in factory jobs, was viewed as a sign of economic destitution and desperation.[6]

Although both government reports and social reformers' writings in the 1920s and 1930s focused on the (under)development of a modern industrial economy in Beijing, another feature of the local economy was, as Madeleine Yue Dong aptly points out, the existence of intense petty trade. Any item was a commodity that could be traded for cash.[7] At any given point in time, any person could become a trader or a broker, exchanging goods and/or services under a market system. Women, especially married women, found themselves valuable in a wide variety of service trades. At one end of the spectrum of service work was the most commonly seen and socially acceptable work, such as domestic service and mending and washing clothing; at the opposite end was the more tabooed sex work. These various types of temporary work, and the economic transactions they entailed, formed the fabric of an informal part of the urban economy.

The existence of such an informal economy deeply troubled political and social leaders in Beijing, as these jobs were not cures for but rather markers of mass poverty, declining household income, female dependency, and even moral downfall—all in defiance of reformist visions and threatening to derail the city from the path of economic and social modernization. Nevertheless, odd jobs and the informal economy helped lower-class women survive in tough times. Many women turned

5. BPSSHJ, J2-7-408, "Beijing tebieshi neiwai chengqu dongji shimin zhiye diaocha gaikuangbiao" (The winter survey of the occupation of residents in the inner and outer districts of Beijing), 1944.
6. BJZGH, 101-1-262, "Qu gonghui banshichu lingdao xia de nügong gongzuo zongjie" (Summary report of women workers' work led by the district office of the Worker's Union), 1949.
7. Madeleine Yue Dong, *Republican Beijing*, pp. 135–41.

home space into a workplace to conduct business—from making handicrafts to offering sexual services to lower-class male patrons. Work of these kinds rarely required specialized skills, certifications, employers, fixed schedules, or even regular worksites. They indeed brought women some level of material support and financial reassurance. It is through studying their patterns of work that this chapter recognizes the various ways in which women took advantage of economic opportunities and coped with constraints in wartime Beijing.

The Evolution of *zhiye*

Zhiye, or "occupation," is a compound word in Chinese combining two characters: *zhi* (職 duty, job, post) and *ye* (業 profession, trade, business). It first appeared in the writings of philosophers during the Warring States period in the 4th century BCE, where it referred to duties and professions.[8] Despite its classical origin, *zhiye* did not appear in several early Chinese-English dictionaries compiled by foreign missionaries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as Walter Medhurst's *English and Chinese Dictionary* (2nd ed., 1848), Donald MacGillivray's *A Mandarin-Romanized Dictionary of Chinese* (1905), George Carter Stent's *A Dictionary from English to Colloquial Mandarin Chinese* (1905), and Herbert Giles's *A Chinese-English Dictionary* (2nd ed., 1912). In Walter Medhurst's *English and Chinese Dictionary*, for instance, he chose the following translations:

occupation ~ 藝業, 藝事, 事業;
profession ~ 事業, 藝業, 手藝;
vocation ~ 事業.[9]

Though not using the compound word *zhiye*, missionary lexicographers included the single character *zhi* and emphasized its usage in combination with other characters when referring to an official errand or government service:

8. *Ciyuan*, pp. 2536–38.
9. Medhurst, *English and Chinese Dictionary*, pp. 894, 1011, and 1397.

職官 ~ officers,
職銜 ~ official rank,
職員 ~ an official generally of low rank,
受職 ~ to receive an appointment,
落職 ~ to be degraded in rank.[10]

Chinese lexicographers occasionally used *zhiye* to translate the English words "occupation," "employment," and "vocation" when these words stood alone.[11] But when translating the above English words when they were found in a sentence, *zhiye* was often replaced by other words that corresponded with the social rank of the speaker and with the social hierarchy existing between the interlocutors. Yan Huiqing's 1916 dictionary, for example, provided three ways to translate the English sentence, "What is your employment?":

1. 你有何手藝? (手藝 *shouyi* commonly means handicraft skills, and such a usage often appears in a conversation between laborers or in an elite person's inquiry into a lower-class person's profession.)
2. 爾做何行業? (行業 *hangye* means profession, business, or trade, and is often used in the context of a conversation between businessmen in reference to a commercial profession.)
3. 請教貴業? (貴業 *guiye* literally means "honorable profession"; it is a polite way to inquire into the employment of a person who presumably has a respectable livelihood.)[12]

The examination of the way in which Chinese and foreign lexicographers explained and translated *zhiye* indicates that up until the early twentieth century, *zhiye* had not yet become a popularly used term in Chinese and, therefore, lexicographers either neglected it or chose other Chinese words to translate the English words "occupation" or "employment" in a sentence.

The Republican period, especially the era from the late 1920s to mid-1930s, fostered the usage of *zhiye* and saw a proliferation of new meanings surrounding it. We see this, for example, in the dictionary

10. Giles, *A Chinese*-English *Dictionary*, p. 225; MacGillivray, *A Mandarin-Romanized Dictionary of Chinese*, p. 341.
11. Li Yuwen, *Hanying xin cidian*, p. 496.
12. Yan, *Yinghua da cidian*, p. 747.

edited by Robert H. Mathews. In the preface, Mathews stresses that "the influx of modern inventions and the advance of scientific knowledge brought in a wealth of new ideas," which made "the old dictionary out of date."[13] His chief objective was therefore to include up-to-date usage of words and new expressions that reflected China's rapidly changing cultural and social landscape. With regard to the term *zhiye,* he included both the term itself and seven compound phrases containing *zhiye*:

職業上 ~ vocational,
職業之禮儀 ~ professional etiquette,
職業倫理 ~ ethics of a profession,
職業學校 ~ vocational schools,
職業指導 ~ vocational guidance,
職業教育 ~ vocational education,
職業組合 ~ trades' unions.[14]

The increasing number of dictionary entries on *zhiye*-related terms offers a telling sign of the word's burgeoning importance and popularity in contemporary usage. The increase also sheds light on the larger reform movements that not only changed political and social institutions, but also brought a new way of speaking about them.

The new vocabulary came primarily from three sources: newly invented words, neologisms that gave existing Chinese words new meanings, and "return graphic loans," which, according to Lydia Liu, were "classical Chinese-character compounds that were used by the Japanese to translate modern European words and were reintroduced into modern Chinese."[15] They offered Chinese people a means to translate foreign works and critically examine new ideas and knowledge from overseas, which in turn enabled Chinese political and social leaders to imagine and reshape China's political, social, and cultural future. In the case of *zhiye*, it could be a neologism or one of these "return graphic loans." In the late Qing, Chinese officials and constitutional reformers such as Kang Youwei (1858–1927) who had been living in Japan returned to China discussing reform programs implemented during the Meiji

13. Mathews, *A Chinese-English Dictionary*, vi.
14. Ibid, p. 137.
15. Lydia Liu, *Translingual Practice*, p. 302.

Restoration period in the late nineteenth century. They noticed that the new household registration law required Japanese citizens to report their employment, or *shokugyou*, to a government agency. Chinese reformers might have simply taken the Japanese *kangji* word back to China. But once the word (re)entered Chinese vocabulary, *zhiye* became more than just "tokens of exchange" in the global circulation of knowledge.[16] It facilitated an indigenous discourse on employment, industrialized economy, and the nation's wealth that ultimately reconfigured women's livelihoods in relation to the urban political economy.

Women and the Urban Political Economy

On July 16, 1946, the GMD government passed the "Household Registration Implementation Instructions" (*Hukou chaji shishi banfa* 戶口查記實施辦法), in which it broadly defined *zhiye* as "a work by which a person, directly or indirectly, earns cash or other forms of material benefits."[17] It further stipulated that "unpaid work, receiving cash or other material benefit without working, living on aid, or working while incarcerated" shall not be considered as *zhiye*. In other words, one will be considered as having a *zhiye* as long as one is gainfully employed. Then administrators began to further define *zhiye* in a more selective manner in the latter section of the registration guideline when defining "unemployment," which included the following categories:

1. those who do not work but live off interests of properties, such as landlords and lenders of high-interest loans;
2. those who make a living by providing superstitious services such as "making divination" (*buwu* 卜巫), "studying astral images" (*xingxiang* 星相), and "studying geomancy" (*kanyu* 堪輿); and those who are Buddhist monks and Daoist clerics and rely on alms to make a living; people who fall under these two categories will be viewed as unem-

16. I borrow the term "tokens of exchange" from the title of a volume edited by Lydia H. Liu. See Liu, *Tokens of Exchange*.
17. BPSJCJWC, J184-2-159, "Neizhengbu ge shengshi hukou chaji shishi banfa" [Interior Ministry: Household registration implementation instructions], July 16, 1946.

ployed. However, those who recite religious texts to make a living will be viewed as religious professionals or freelance workers;[18]

3. those who make a living on "evil" (*xie'e* 邪惡) businesses, such as brothels and gambling houses;
4. inmates of prisons and poor houses;
5. full-time students;
6. those who manage the household but not directly increase family income.

It seems from the way "unemployment" was defined that not all types of gainful employment qualified as *zhiye*. Those criteria indicate that government officials did not view employment broadly and vaguely as the performance of any work that sustained individual livelihood. Instead, in a quite selective and politically charged way, they envisioned *zhiye* to be a productive and moral labor that safeguarded personal financial well-being and increased the wealth of society and the Chinese nation.

This certainly was not the first policy initiative to uphold a firm belief in productive labor. The principles and practices of poverty relief in early twentieth-century China studied by Janet Chen provide another telling example. Chen shows that the poverty relief methods in the Ming and Qing periods, which were built on combining mechanisms of family support, private charity, and occasional help from the paternalistic imperial government, had been under attack since the late Qing reform movement. Reformers, including both officials and social leaders, repudiated traditional relief methods by criticizing them as inefficient, ineffective, and, even worse, counterproductive, as they cultivated a culture of "parasitic dependence" whereby the poor "subsisted on charity." [19] The new poverty relief administration believed

18. The GMD government was aiming to make a distinction between religions and superstition. The former referred to religious professionals who practiced state-sanctioned religions such as Buddhism, Daoism, Christianity, and Islam; the latter, in contrast, included people such as divinators, astrologers, and geomancers, who were not affiliated with any religious or secular institutions. For the study of the confrontation between secularism and religion in modern China and modern Chinese states' attempt to re-categorize religious practices (especially popular religion), see Nedostup, *Superstitious Regimes*; and Poon, *Negotiating Religion in Modern China*.
19. Janet Chen, *Guilty of Indigence*, p. 2.

that people should work, or be forced to work if necessary, to achieve an orderly and moral society. Labor and discipline could help people secure one's own livelihood and make a contribution to the common good and the nation's strength.

More than an issue of political economy, the household registration instructions showcase another shared belief among government officials who upheld the value of employment for all. Beijing in the early twentieth century was home to a dangerous and expanding class of bankrupt Manchus, poverty-stricken peasants, disbanded soldiers, and hard-working laborers living on the social and economic margins. Though not a lawless territory, the city witnessed crimes of all kinds.[20] The seemingly ubiquitous presence of police officers on the street, which impressed American sociologist Sidney Gamble and prompted him to call Beijing "the best policed city in the Orient," could also suggest that peace was fragile and order illusive. Criminologist Yen Ching-Yueh (Yan Jingyao, 1905–76) once worried that crime not only threatened the way of life in Beijing but also increasingly became the norm for many who struggled to survive.[21] In his view, no institution was more alarming and visible in its violation of women's bodies and social morality than prostitution. Women who participated in the sex trade were regarded by him as victims of poverty and sexual crimes; brothels that dotted the urban landscape of nightlife "epitomized moral deficiency" in Beijing.[22] If crime and immoral behavior were signs of people drifting away from the social and familial order, then *zhiye*, as officials believed, could foster a secured source of livelihood, a sense of belonging to a community, a venue of upward social mobility, and a deterrence of disorderly and criminal conduct.

Social activists joined forces with government officials to reinvent and enrich the meaning of *zhiye*. Besides tying employment to the success of the urban political economy in Beijing, they sought particularly to define it within the larger context of China's strenuous efforts to industrialize and to revive its ailing economy. To them, *zhiye* was not just any type of paid work or productive labor but must be jobs embedded in, and must contribute to, industrialization. The Chinese National

20. Gamble, *Peking: A Social Survey*, p. 75.
21. Yen, "Crime in Relation to Social Change in China."
22. Cheng, *City of Working Women*, p. 165.

Association of Vocational Education (中華職業教育社 Zhonghua zhiye jiaoyushe, hereafter CNAVE), founded in Shanghai in April 1917, embodied and spearheaded the attempts of social activists to translate this industrial notion of *zhiye* into programs designed to educate women and men in practical knowledge, factory skills, and work discipline.[23] At its peak of activity in the 1920s and 1930s, CNAVE ran a journal entitled *Education and Vocation* (*Jiaoyu yu zhiye* 教育與職業) and published a series of research monographs studying the development of vocational education in the West and challenges that educators faced in China. Dozens of vocational schools were opened in several provinces (including Beijing), and exhibitions featuring products made by students in industrial workshops were held on an annual basis to call public attention to the progress of vocational training nationwide. The membership of CNAVE grew from 800 in 1917 to more than 23,000 by 1937.[24]

The CNAVE schools designed a curricular program offering two programs of study: clerical and manufacturing. The clerical program educated students in basic sciences, calligraphy, use of the abacus, accounting, mathematics, bookkeeping, and business English. Advanced students also had opportunities to intern for banks, shops, accounting firms, and factories. For students in the manufacturing program, there were four options: bench work (*qiangong* 鉗工), forging work (*duangong* 鍛工), foundry work (*zhugong* 鑄工), and carpentry work (*mugong* 木工). Upon completing a two-year course of study, students continued on to a three-year advanced program during which half of their credit hours would be devoted to in-class learning and half to a factory internship. The CNAVE curriculum manifested what its founders claimed to be the essence of vocational education, which, as Wen-Hsin Yeh summarizes, "harp[ed] on the theme of social advancement through hard work and persistent discipline and encouraged the youthful aspirants

23. Founders of the Chinese National Association of Vocational Education included Wu Tingfang (伍廷芳, 1842–1922, diplomat and legal reformer), Liang Qichao (梁啟超, 1873–1929, leader of the 1898 reform and prominent intellectual), Zhang Jian (張謇, 1853–1926, social reformer and industrialist), Fan Yuanlian (範源濂, 1877–1928, Minister of Education and the president of Beijing Normal University), Cai Yuanpei (蔡元培, 1868–1940, the president of Peking University), and Huang Yanpei (黃炎培, 1878–1965, educational reformer and political activist).

24. Wen-Hsin Yeh, "Huang Yanpei," p. 39.

to focus their energy on pragmatic knowledge."[25] By teaching students to respect productive work and learn practical skills, vocational education provided a credential and an alternative route for hardworking women and men without college degrees to compete for employment in an industrial economy and commercial capitalism. To be clear, the CNAVE and other programs with similar agendas might not be able to ensure every one of their trainees an urban middle-class future; but over time they helped to industrialize the meaning of *zhiye* and transform it from a novel, albeit abstract, reformist slogan into a school curriculum and a specific regimen that aimed to train an able workforce for China's emerging industrial economy.

Vocational schools admitted women students, too. In 1933, a teenage girl named Zheng Zijing decided to apply to the Hebei Provincial Vocational Training Institute (Hebeisheng nüzi zhiye jiaoyu jiangxisuo 河北省女子職業教育講習所). In response to the entrance examination essay requirement to explain her background, reasons to pursue vocational education, and career goals after school, she wrote:

> I spent my childhood growing up in the countryside. Even though I completed primary school, I constantly feel that what I have learned so far is still not enough for me to thrive in current society. . . . If a woman is not able to live independently, her future is dark. . . . To find out the root cause of [women's problem], it is because they do not have proper employment (*zhengdang de zhiye* 正當的職業) and this is truly dangerous! The purpose of the Vocational Training Institute is to inculcate women with professional skills, which will ensure their independent existence in the future. Women will be able to free themselves from feudal suppression and gender constraints, and will be able to enjoy the freedom to which women are entitled. . . . To earn their own living and stop relying upon others is the only way that women can improve their own status. Real freedom and equality will come after all.[26]

The essay illuminates several achievements that the vocational education movement had made in a relatively short span of time. At the outset, it is remarkable to see a teenage girl and primary school grad-

25. Ibid, p. 35.
26. BPNZZYXX, J28-1-81, "Shishu toukao nüzi zhiye xuexiao de zhiyuan" [On my intention of applying to the Vocational Training Institute], Zheng Zijing, 1933.

uate mastering new terms such as "*zhiye*," "independence" (*duli* 獨立), "suppression" (*yapo* 壓迫), "freedom" (*ziyou* 自由), and "equality" (*pingdeng* 平等) to articulate reformist ideals, as well as relating her own educational choice and career development to the future of her gender and the Chinese nation. The movement, through voluminous speeches and publications, school curricula, and home assignments, provided a common framework of communication between leaders, supporters, and the masses the movement sought to educate. Once the communication channels and protocols were established and practiced, reformist ideals went beyond the elite circle and lay within the grasp of ordinary women and men. In less than two decades, the vocational education movement had successfully transformed itself from a career development service into an agent of social reform, particularly with regard to women's liberation.

Many leaders of the vocational education movement were strong supporters of the larger social and cultural reform efforts in early twentieth-century China; and their attempts to improve women's social status by expanding their employment opportunities struck a chord with contemporary women's rights advocates who envisioned employment as the path towards women's liberation. "As a result of the lack of employment," one reform leader contended, women "have no choice but to lead a life parasitic upon men's support and to become men's slaves."[27] Echoing this point, in 1933, the same year when Zheng Zijing was applying for a provincial vocational school, Zhang Ruyi was completing her senior thesis in the Sociology Department at Yenching University; she wrote in her thesis introduction that "among all of the rights that Chinese women have gained [since the Nationalist revolution], the right to employment is crucial." "If Chinese women attempt to achieve equal status as men," she continued, "they must seek economic independence first, i.e., to be able to support their own livelihood without relying upon men."[28]

A prevalent and persistent argument among women's rights advocates was that there should be an overhaul of the school curriculum at all educational institutions. It emphasized that conventional schooling was based on the outdated model and erroneous conception that aimed

27. Luo Jialun, "Funü jiefang," p. 15.
28. Zhang Ruyi, "Beiping de nü zhaodai," p. 2.

to prepare men to take examinations and molded women into "virtuous wives and good mothers" (*xianqi liangmu* 賢妻良母).[29] The new school curriculum, in sharp contrast, represented a "career-oriented" (*zunzhong zhiye* 尊重職業) education that prioritized practical training over book knowledge and sought to cultivate a sense of self-esteem and self-worth. Women were prepared to work for economic improvement and, more crucially, to build their "independent personhood" (*duli renge* 獨立人格), which, as Bryna Goodman put it, was built on productive work and key virtues such as "independent thinking, self-reliance, and individual moral integrity."[30] Even if the vocational education movement did not find for every woman in China a *zhiye*, it successfully created and promoted a gendered *zhiye* discourse that linked women's social autonomy and independent personhood to their employment status.

While the concept of liberating women through education and employment continued to resonate among reform leaders and supporters and affected many women's life courses throughout the early twentieth century, the Nationalist revolution in the late 1920s and the ensuing state-building process under the GMD further politicized the meaning of *zhiye*. To GMD cadres and municipal officials in Beijing, employment was an economic issue with important political ramifications. Whether or not more jobs could be created became a measure of the government's sincerity and capability of fulfilling its paternalistic promise to improve individual well-being. Moreover, employment gave people a professional and institutional identity; and likewise the work unit fostered political identification and facilitated action. Together they allowed officials to enumerate, categorize, and ultimately mobilize people to accomplish the revolutionary agenda of defending and reconstructing the Chinese nation-state. The Beijing Municipal Government's attitude towards waitressing provides a case in point.

Municipal officials in the 1930s recognized waitressing as a new form of employment and, in general, held a positive view of the rapid recruitment of women for this job. They processed new waitress registrations and passed a series of regulations to formalize the recruitment

29. Luo Jialun, "Funü jiefang," p. 15.
30. Goodman, "The Vocational Woman," p. 265. Also see Zhao Ma, "Nüxing yu zhiye," pp. 58–87.

and employment of waitresses. Waitressing was for municipal officials not just an issue of bureaucratic management but an opportunity for social engineering. The Bureau of Social Affairs opened the Waitress Training School (Nü zhaodai xunlian suo 女招待訓練所) in June 1930, designed to "equip women with professional expertise" (*zhiye zhishi* 職業知識). In August of 1930, under the direction of the Beijing Women's Association (Beiping funü xiehui 北平婦女協會), the Waitresses' Association (Nü dianyuan xiehui 女店員協會) was established with the mandate to represent waitresses in society and to "cultivate women's sense of occupational dignity" (*zhiye zunyan* 職業尊嚴).[31] The association's founders declared:

> From today on, we will collaborate with all women sympathetic to us and establish a united organization. Under the discipline of the GMD, [members of our organization] will cultivate a strong character. We will enlighten other women, fight for equal occupational opportunities for men and women, support working women, and achieve women's liberation. Under the leadership of the GMD, we will fight to the end on the side of the national revolution and against evil social practice. We will commit ourselves to a life-or-death struggle to fight against any force that prohibits women's occupation and liberation.[32]

There are several noteworthy points in this declaration. The social reform ideals to improve women's status and to treat women as an equal member of society had stood out prominently in the political party's revolutionary agenda. The GMD argued that women had fallen victim to gender seclusion and economic subjugation for centuries, and this had inhibited them from participating fully and equally in social and political affairs. But *zhiye* helped individuals achieve a fulfilling life by means of giving them access to economic resources and encouraging them to make decisions to gain both short-term benefits and long-term development. It instilled independence, productivity, and civic-mindedness that not only empowered women socially and economically but also benefited Chinese society as a whole. Politically, *zhiye* produced a disciplined subject and dedicated foot soldier for the revolutionary cause. At the

31. Zhang Ruyi, "Beiping de nü zhaodai," p. 24.
32. *Beiping xin chenbao* [Beijing's new morning daily], August 18, 1930. From Wang Qin, "Jindai chengshi kongjian," pp. 74–75.

same time, it provided a collective public identity and a sense of social and political belonging grounded in a shared work rhythm and public work site, common challenges in work security and benefits, and even a shared language that could help members communicate their sufferings and aspirations. The shared employment thus gave rise to new types of *fatuan* (法團), or professional associations, which enriched people's political strategies and tactics for collective action and helped the party-state group people into organizations that in turn served as building blocks in political movements.[33]

Over the course of the early twentieth century, *zhiye* was constantly redefined. An exploration of the word's etymological origin and semantic meanings illustrates how the matter of women's work intersected with larger issues such as economic reconstruction, women's liberation, and national salvation. The interplay helped to invent, industrialize, engender, and politicize *zhiye*. In the midst of social reform and economic change, women joined the labor force. In 1937, Dou Xueqian, a sociology major from Yenching University, used data collected from field work to prove that the number of working women was increasing. Manufacturing workers and service workers were two main occupational groups that attracted women, especially those who were entering the job market with limited education and professional experience. According to Dou, women also began to break new ground by working as teachers, librarians, doctors, nurses, editors, journalists, translators, interpreters, lawyers, lab assistants, pharmacists, accountants, secretaries, typists, stenographers, and telephone operators.[34] It seems that both women's career futures and the urban economy moved forward, following the path charted by reformers.

However, back in the Beijing District Court, facing judicial officials' routine questioning about their employment, women who came to court began to recount their work experiences. These testimonies bring to light a diverse work pattern ranging from full-time employment to part-time jobs, and from seasonal work to odd jobs. Some were regularly paying jobs requiring professional training and even certification; most were not. Women's experiences in many ways directly

33. For the structure and political potential of civic organizations in Republican Beijing, see Strand, *Rickshaw Beijing*, pp. 18–19.
34. Dou, "Zhongguo funü de diwei," pp. 22–26.

challenged the way reformers designed the urban economy and defined women's economic prospects. Nevertheless, their experience enables us to ask questions such as what role a lower-class woman like Chen Ma Shi played in the process of defining *zhiye*, why her multiple jobs did not qualify as *zhiye* even though they kept her busy each day and all day, and whether she personally had a place in the process that sought to define the meaning of her work and the urban economy in which she participated. The answers to these questions bring us to a different dimension of the *zhiye* discourse: z*hiye* as a place where reformist vision met social reality, and where government policy met women's survival tactics.

Women in Factories

To tabulate the number of women factory workers in early twentieth-century Beijing was a challenge, because "factory work" was an inclusive category that referred to a wide range of jobs—from performing mechanical tasks in modern factories to making military apparel, accessories (socks, handkerchiefs, towels), and sleepwear in workshops. The city had only a few modern factories and therefore a very small population of women industrial workers compared to cities like Shanghai and Tianjin. The Beijing Municipal Police Department's survey of employment in 1933 shows that 10,060 women held jobs in such sectors as mining, manufacturing, commerce, transportation, and government. However, the gender ratio in these sectors was extremely unbalanced, with men outnumbering women by a ratio of as much as 21:1 (see table 1.1). About ten years later, out of the 266 factories operating in Beijing, only 17 employed women. Five hundred and seventy-four women workers accounted for less than 1 percent of the city's female population.[35] In 1944, the Bureau of Social Affairs found that 11,025 women were employed in manufacturing jobs, which accounted for 10.8

35. Beijingshi dang'anguan, "Riwei tongzhi houqi Beijingshi gequ gongchang diaochabiao" [Survey of factories operating in Beijing in the final years of the Japanese occupation and puppet rule (by district)], p. 69.

Table 1.1
Residents' Occupations, Beijing (1932–33)

	Male	Female
Agriculture	4,313	1,427
Mining	2,563	164
Manufacturing	82,659	7,057
Commerce	102,102	2,801
Transportation	21,457	18
Government	10,564	20
"New professionals"[a]	184,749	33,682
Service	77,395	99,246
Unemployed	186,400	16,2305

[a] The Chinese term for this category is *ziyou zhiye* (literally translated "flexible occupation"), which, according to official classification, included medical professionals, social workers, education professionals, and religious workers. BPSJCJWC, J184-2-159, "Neizhengbu ge shengshi hukou chaji shishi banfa" (Methods of maintaining household registration, Ministry of Interior Affairs), 1946.
Source: BPSJCJ, J181-1-371, "Renkou zhiye xibie biao" (Detailed table of population and occupation), 1932.

percent of the entire labor force in this sector.[36] These disappointing figures defined the city's economic structure. As a political center and cultural hub for centuries, Beijing had been home to emperors, bureaucrats, merchants, intellectuals, artists, and other professionals, but not industrialists. Various municipal governments had tried to industrialize the city several times since the turn of the twentieth century, but their attempts had largely failed. Beijing remained known for its imperial glamour, commerce, and culture, not its modern industrial vigor.

The following case reveals women's opportunities in the city's industrial and semi-industrial economy and, more importantly, their working lives on the edge of subsistence. During the Spring Festival of 1943, Xie Junru visited his parents-in-law to wish them well. While there, neighbors told him that it was rumored that his wife, twenty-four-year-old Xie Chang Shi, was having an affair. Xie Junru was shocked.

36. BPSSHJ, J2-7-408, "Beijing tebieshi neiwai chengqu dongji shimin zhiye diaocha gaikuangbiao."

He was a commercial painter with a home in the Inner-3 District; but his work required him to live at his workshop in the Outer-5 District, so he only occasionally went back home. Suspecting that his wife had indeed done something unfaithful, Xie Junru wanted to investigate the matter but did not confront her right away. On the morning of July 24, 1943, he returned to his house, bringing his mother with him. They sneaked into the living room, and looking through the window to the bedroom, they caught Xie Chang Shi sleeping with another man. Seven days later, Xie Junru brought the case to the Beijing District Court and accused both his wife and her sexual partner of adultery. During the court investigation, Xie Chang Shi stated that she worked in a garment mill on a day shift. It was while commuting every day that she made the acquaintance of twenty-three-year-old Xu Guoxiang, who made a living binding books at a nearby publishing house. While she barely made ends meet, he appeared to be generous to her. Then he began dropping by her home once every three or four days and always brought with him some cash. In time their friendship grew into an affair.[37]

The garment mill where Xie Chang Shi worked was founded in 1912 by the Ministry of War to make uniforms and equipment for armies. It was, in Sidney Gamble's terms, the only place in Beijing "where women were employed in any considerable numbers."[38] Three to five thousand women worked there. Most of them were over twenty years of age, but girls as young as twelve were also employed.[39] The garment mill represented one of the first government-sponsored industrialization initiatives in Beijing that sought to tap into the pool of female laborers. Since then, various municipal governments had made considerable efforts to industrialize the city and recruit women into the industrial workforce; but they accomplished little, neither overhauling urban economic structure nor safeguarding women's and men's livelihood. The city's industrial sector, particularly mining, manufacturing, and transportation, consistently failed to generate jobs for women.

When factory jobs were rare, more women worked in smaller handicraft workshops embroidering silk, weaving with woolen thread, making matchboxes and paper flowers, stitching shoes, and making

37. BPDFFY, J65-7-10254, Xie Chang Shi, 1943.
38. Gamble, *Peking: A Social Survey*, p. 221.
39. Li Jinghan, "Beiping zuidi xiandu de shenghuo chengdu de taolun," p. 8.

Table 1.2
Handicraft Workshops in the Outer-3 District, December 1943

Shoe boxes	1	Socks	6	Shoes	8
Lacquerware	2	Towels	6	Rugs	5
Cotton thread	5	Bone artifacts	1	Candlewicks	3
Weaving cotton cloth	3	Book binding	7	Soap	3
Copper and ironware	11	Cloisonné enamel	3	Daily utensils	3
Floral designs	11				

Source: BPSSHJ, J2-7-408, "Beijing tebieshi neiwai chengqu dongji gongye hangye diaochabiao" [The industry of Beijing special municipality, winter 1943], 1943.

Table 1.3
Factories in the Outer-3 District, December 1943

Iron work	10	Rugs	3	Cotton cloth	38
Nails	8	Cotton thread	2	Towels	2
Leather	2				

Source: BPSSHJ, J2-7-408, "Beijing tebieshi neiwai chengqu dongji gongye hangye diaochabiao" [The industry of Beijing special municipality, winter 1943], 1943.

toothbrushes.[40] Municipal officials kept track of the proliferation of handicraft workshops in Beijing. They found, for example, that in the winter of 1943, in the Outer-3 District where Xie Chang Shi lived, there were seventy-eight workshops and sixty-five smaller-sized semi-industrialized factories (see tables 1.2 and 1.3). Six years later in 1949, the newly established CCP Municipal Government drew a similar conclusion in its survey of women's employment. It found that there were 20,234 female workers in Beijing. Nearly half of them (9,380) were working in small handicraft workshops, at home, or were self-employed. Another one-third of female workers (7,716) were engaged in different kinds of menial labor, farm labor, or were in the service and transportation industries. Modern factories employed only 3,138 women (see table 1.4).[41]

40. Ibid. For women's role in Beijing's family-based handicraft industry, see also Weikun Cheng, *City of Working Women*.
41. Again, the category "worker" comprised several occupational groups, including almost all that made a living by manual labor. The way by which workers were vaguely and broadly defined, as I argue, could be politically motivated. The statistical proj-

Table 1.4
Workers in Beijing, December 1949

	Male workers	Female workers
Factories	31,824	3,138
Public utility services	19,418	803
Handicraft workshops	53,306	7,392
Self-employed handicrafts	53,799	1,988
Transport	59,382	142
Agricultural, horticultural, and dairy farms	1,146	62
Retail shops	83,074	783
Menial labor	15,571	5,926
Total	317,520	20,234

Source: BJFL, 84-2-4, "Beijingshi gejie funü gaikuang tongjibiao" [Survey of women of different classes in Beijing], December 1949.

All municipal surveys and labor statistics confirm that the female unemployment rate stayed high in Beijing throughout the first half of the twentieth century; but this was not just a matter of lack of jobs due to the city's unsuccessful attempt at industrialization. Officials, sociologists, and later communist labor organizers found that women in the industrial workforce were not permanent proletarians. Women saw a factory job as an unreliable livelihood, a temporary stage in one's life, and the least desirable choice of occupation. Young women earned a few years' wages and then left factories and married; married women with any choice in the matter gravitated to other occupations or simply relied on spousal support.

ect served at least two political purposes. First, it established "workers" as the largest occupational group for women in Beijing, outnumbering the combination of the next three occupational groups, the "government and public service sector" (*zhiyuan* 職員, 5,992 women), the "self-employed" (*ziyou zhiyezhe* 自由職業者, 5,634), and the "culture and education sector" (*wenjiao gongzuozhe* 文教工作者, 5,091). This gave the unfolding urban Communist revolution a larger pool from which the Party could recruit leaders and foot soldiers. Second, female workers' statistical prominence allowed the Party to allocate to them, especially the industrial workers, a bigger share of power in the city-wide and cross-class women's movement. For more discussion of the CCP's efforts to enumerate and mobilize female workers in Beijing, see Zhao Ma, "Female Workers."

Several factors account for the fact that many women in Beijing did not stay in factory work. First and foremost, many women perceived factory work as demeaning. Local mores strongly disapproved of women working in factories, since doing so defied conventional gender proprieties that sought to confine women to domestic quarters. Despite decades-long cultural reforms that strove to integrate women into society through employment, such conservative views, though discredited in official rhetoric, retained their force in everyday ethics. For example, Chen Hanfen, a senior student studying sociology at Yenching University in 1940, conducted a survey among women of peasant households living in Beijing's northern suburbs. She found that it was socially acceptable for women to help out on the farm. However, to go outside of the home to make money was absolutely a "shameful act" (*xiuchi shi* 羞恥事); and a woman's "appearing in public" (*paotou lumian* 抛頭露面) to work as a factory worker or domestic servant brought disgrace upon both the woman herself and her family.[42] About ten years later, Communist labor organizers also reached the conclusion that many women in Beijing take up factory work only when they have run out of all other options.[43]

Fearful of social disapproval, women who already worked in factories were reluctant to publicly display their identity as a worker. Lü Guo, a Communist newspaper reporter, captured the stigma female workers carried. In her words, "Whenever people see garment mill workers, they will quickly cover their noses and deride them by saying 'Hey! Here come students of the garment university (*beifu daxue* 被服大學),' and 'we can smell you before we see you.'"[44] To avoid this kind of verbal harassment, Lü wrote, many women workers chose to hide their occupations. For example, they would not enter the factory if they saw their friends around. Lü recounted an embarrassing incident involving Ma Wenhui, a worker from No. 3 Garment Mill. One day on her way to work, she ran into a girl who had once attended the same school as her. When she greeted her friend, Ma Wenhui hid her lunch box behind

42. Chen Hanfen, "Beiping beijiao moucun funü diwei," p. 50.
43. BJZGH, 101-1-262, "Benbu gongzuo zongjie" [Summary report of the committee's work], 1949.
44. Lü, "Jiefang qianhou: Beiping beifuchang de nü gong" [Before and after the liberation: Female workers in Beijing's garment mills]. In Xin Zhongguo funü (Women of New China), January 1949, p. 38.

her back but accidentally dropped it on the ground, which exposed her mill worker identity to her friend. She felt extremely embarrassed. But later, she learned that her friend in fact also worked in a mill nearby, and during that unexpected encounter, she was also trying to hide that fact.[45] In addition to this individual instance, factory surveys found that women workers themselves "look down upon laboring work" and "don't want to be seen as workers but as students."[46] Some workers attempted to disguise themselves as students by adopting students' dress styles, hairstyles, and behavior.[47]

Many women regarded factory jobs as undesirable not only because of the cultural biases associated with them but also because of the real difficulties these jobs posed for women. Most employers saw women as a main source of cheap labor. They hired women to perform simple tasks that required minimal training and experience, which in turn prohibited women from moving up the wage-scale ladder, to jobs that required higher levels of skill. Employers justified the ceiling on women's wages by arguing that women were not the primary breadwinners of households. Therefore they could settle for low wages to supplement family income, since they did not carry the chief burden of family support.[48] For example, government statistics taken during the Republican period demonstrate that during the period between 1926 and 1930, women's wages not only did not grow but decreased by about 5 percent. This means that women in 1930 were not able to maintain the same living standard that they had maintained five years earlier. The survey also found that most women workers' monthly wages at the time were below the fifteen-*yuan* subsistence minimum for an individual, let alone an entire family.[49] In the above-cited Xie Chang Shi's case, she testified that she earned 0.7 to 0.8 *yuan* per workday, which could buy her less than half a *jin* of millet or corn at the current food price, not enough for a day's meal.[50] She did receive a monthly allowance in the amount of sixty

45. Ibid.
46. BJZGH, 101-1-262, "Benbu gongzuo zongjie."
47. BJFL, 84-2-15, "Nügong gongzuo cailiao zhengli" [Summary report of works with female workers], 1949.
48. BJZGH, 101-1-262, "Qu gonghui banshichu lingdao xia de nügong gongzuo zongjie."
49. Mai Qianzeng, "Zhongguo gongchang nügong gongzi zhi yanjiu."
50. BPSJ, J211-1-4, "Beiping wujia diaochabiao" [Price survey in Beijing], 1943.

yuan from her husband Xie Junru; but given the inflation, she was still not able to make ends meet. It was under this dire circumstance Xie Chang Shi befriended Xu Guoxiang, which brought to her some financial help but eventually led to an affair and a lawsuit.

Employers also tended to employ women on a short-term basis. At the Women's Handicraft Institute, for example, women were hired to work for up to two years, during which time they could acquire enough skills to find jobs elsewhere when their two-year period of employment ended. The Institute explained this policy in terms of its welfare mission. Founded in 1941, it was not a self-sustaining, for-profit business but relied on municipal funds allocated through the Bureau of Social Affairs to cover its operating costs and subsidize female workers' daily meals. According to its by-laws, the Institute only admitted women who were in dire financial situations and offered training programs to teach them practical skills.[51] Fixed-term employment allowed more women to benefit from the program while discouraging women from viewing the program as a source of long-term welfare.[52] In garment mills, female workers were hired on different terms. Those operating the weaving machines (*chegong* 車工, *jiqi gong* 機器工) were hired on a long-term basis and paid relatively well. They brought income to their families and sometimes could even afford to buy cosmetics for themselves. But workers who performed unskilled tasks such as stitching buttonholes by hand had a tougher life, as they earned very little and faced periodic layoffs.[53]

51. BPSSHJ, J2-1-263, "Funü shougongchang zuzhi guize" [Women's Handicraft Institute by-laws], 1939.
52. Political crisis and economic turmoil toward the end of the Civil War drastically changed the Institute's operation, especially its hiring policy. As GMD rule crumbled, the city struggled to cope with runaway inflation, the pauperization of urban middle-class families, and a steady wave of refugees driven to Beijing from war-torn Manchuria. Under such pressures, the Municipal Government used the Women's Handicraft Institute as a war relief program and began admitting women from middle-class families, such as those of "declining former bureaucrat households" (*moluo jiu guanliao* 沒落舊官僚), refugee landlords (*taowang dizhu* 逃亡地主), and middle-ranked government employees. They "had lost their fortunes amidst political turmoil and economic crisis," and "took advantage of the municipal program to obtain some immediate relief." BJZGH, 101-1-262, "Qu gonghui banshichu lingdao xia de nügong gongzuo zongjie."
53. BJZGH, 101-1-262, "Benbu gongzuo zongjie."

Other sorts of hardships such as long hours, physical abuses, and sexual harassment from male coworkers and factory managers further deterred women from factory work. The above-cited Communist journalist Lü Guo wrote about the plight of women workers in her report:

> Every morning before dawn, women workers at the garment mill went to work carrying their lunch boxes. The streets were still empty. Making their way to the factory, they were yelled at by patrolling police officers and chased by stray dogs. The stars were often still twinkling in the sky when they arrived. They waited outside of the factory gate against the gusty wind while others still slept. Women workers sighed: "We never had a chance to see the sun, since we got up before sunrise and returned home after sunset. Stars lit our way to and from the factory. Without a clock and for fear of being late, we'd rather get up earlier." There was a woman worker named Zhang Zhen'an. She was late for work because her father was sick. The foreman asked her to leave [the factory]; but she refused to comply. Then the foreman slapped her several times on her face and kicked her out. The factory fired her soon afterwards. Many women were scared to do anything wrong that could cost them their jobs. They had to endure physical abuse and emotional pressure. As such, they leaned against their machines and spent their dreadful and dark days in silence.[54]

To be clear, this report was written in early 1949 for propaganda purposes. Lü and the cadres who gave her this assignment were trying to mobilize the city's working class to help the nascent Communist government rebuild the economy in Beijing. Yet, such a united and politically engaged industrial proletariat class did not exist; the workers were divided by their diverse and complex social backgrounds. Therefore, the Communist propaganda army calculated that they could help women workers overcome personal differences and foster a united proletariat identity by emphasizing their collective pain and suffering under the "evil" capitalist factory system and the GMD's reactionary rule. This shared sense of victimization was expected to transform workers into a politically active and passionate revolutionary mass.

Notwithstanding the propaganda elements, Lü's report reaffirmed a similar tale of factory hardship that had been reiterated in many

54. Lü, "Jiefang qianhou: Beiping beifuchang de nügong," p. 38.

politically neutral studies conducted by sociologists in prior decades. They showed that the wage ceiling, terms of the labor contract, the pattern of household economy, life-cycle events like marriage and childbirth, and social stigma drove many women to take up industrial labor only temporarily. Moreover, they either worked at a series of jobs (including factories) throughout the year, or they worked multiple jobs simultaneously to maximize their incomes. The flexible pattern of work and diverse income sources were singled out by the CCP as destructive to the spirit of labor protests; but they proved to be essential to women's survival.

In sum, although municipal governments and local industrialists made some progress in terms of revitalizing the manufacturing sector by opening factories, these factories failed to transform Beijing into an industrial center. Factory jobs were very limited. Then there were the common hardships of industrial labor: unsafe working conditions, harsh regulations, long hours, wage discrimination, and physical abuse, all of which made factories an unwelcoming place to women. When factory jobs became either unavailable or unattractive to women, especially married women, the service sector provided alternative employment opportunities.

Service Work

On March 18, 1942, the Beijing District Court prosecuted an adultery case involving twenty-nine-year-old Ding Liu Shi. She originally came from Sanhe County, near Beijing's east suburbs. According to her testimony, she married at the age of seventeen to Ding Baoqi, a peasant from her village and four years her senior. The legal proceedings did not disclose the Ding couple's financial condition at the time of their marriage, but the deaths of their young son and daughter, of which Ding Liu Shi testified, suggest their relatively low standard of living—the infant/child mortality rate was significantly higher among the poor in China at the time.[55] Early in 1938, Ding Baoqi headed out of the village

55. "Living standards," Tommy Bengtsson argues, "have a strong impact on demographic behavior, particularly in the past, when a considerable part of the popu-

to work as a cotton picker and left his wife at home alone. Since then, Ding Liu Shi had neither heard from her husband nor received any of the money that he had promised. Finally, starvation forced her to look for other means to get by outside of her home village.[56]

One option for Ding Liu Shi would have been to head south about 150 kilometers to Tianjin, where a remarkably large modern industry had pulled into the city a massive number of rural migrants. According to Gail Hershatter's study, men initially made up the industrial workforce. But starting in the 1920s, women joined the labor force; and by the mid-1930s, some industries, in particular cotton mills, had partially "feminized" their workforce. Rural women were recruited in large numbers to perform simple, low-paying, and unskilled work. Cotton mills "set up recruiting stations in neighborhoods on the outskirts of Tianjin, where recent peasant migrants tended to gather."[57] Or they hired women workers at the factory gate on the morning of the workday. At the time when Ding Liu Shi made the decision to leave her rural home, women comprised about 39 percent of the mill workforce in Tianjin, and this number continued to grow.[58]

Another option for Ding Liu Shi would have been to head sixty kilometers to the west, to Beijing. Restarting life in Beijing was a fairly common strategy adopted among Ding Liu Shi's fellow villagers in Sanhe County; there is a long history of its denizens venturing out to Beijing to look for opportunities. Local sayings claimed that the county was known for "four manys" (*siduo* 四多), a term with a derogatory connotation but one which realistically describes the survival tactics among Sanhe natives who were adapting themselves to the urban economy. They tended to make a living doing four types of work: odd menial jobs, begging, domestic services, and street peddling. In a county

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lation lived close to the margins." The poor were more likely to become victims of malnutrition, which results in "low nutritional intake or disease" and affects "the outcome of lethal diseases and fecundity." Economic factors also influence the "spread of and exposure to disease, hygiene, sanitation, and medical care." Living in such a challenging environment, the poor suffered a high infant mortality rate and short life expectancy. See Bengtsson, "Living Standards and Economic Stress," p. 27.

56. BPDFFY, J65-6-948, Ding Liu Shi and Ding Baotian, 1942.

57. Hershatter, *The Workers of Tianjin*, pp. 142–47.

58. Ibid, p. 55.

gazetteer compiled in the early 1950s, data collected from 293 villages suggested that thousands of villagers went to work in Beijing before 1949. Among them, 6,363 people (including both men and women) worked on odd jobs, and 1,915 begged on the streets. In third place was domestic services, which accounted for the employment of 1,817 women.[59]

Following many of her fellow villagers' footsteps, Ding Liu Shi came to Beijing and found a domestic service job working for a private family. There were four kinds of domestic service positions: cook, wet nurse attending to newborns and young children, maid (*yahuan* 丫環), and female servant (*laomazi* 老媽子) (see fig. 4).[60] Married women, like Ding Liu Shi, were often employed as servants. In fact, only wealthy families could afford to hire a team of servants and assign each a particular task. In most households job categories were not clearly distinguished; a servant performed multiple tasks, allowing the employer to obtain the largest amount of help at the lowest possible cost. Demand for women servants in Beijing remained steady throughout the early twentieth century. Chinese bureaucrat families, retired politicians, well-paid college professors, wealthy merchants, and foreign sojourners made up a sizable pool of employers. Many fled when the Japanese took over the city in 1937, but they were replaced by the vast number of Japanese civil and military personnel in Beijing and the Chinese officials in the collaborationist government.

Domestic service jobs appealed to rural newcomers for several obvious reasons. First, most duties, like cleaning, cooking, sewing, childcare, and housekeeping, did not require special training. Women could turn the skills that they had acquired through practice in their own daily domestic lives into gainful employment. Moreover, in the 1920s and 1930s when the economy was still relatively stable, a servant could earn somewhere between three and six *yuan* per month. With three *yuan*, a servant could buy 345 pieces of *shaobing* 燒餅 (a small, flat, and round bread sprinkled with sesame seeds), 25 *jin* of pork, an 18-foot piece of cloth, or 1 gram of pure gold.[61] In addition, servants lived and ate with their master families at no additional cost. Annual bonuses and tips from guests further increased their earnings.

59. Jin Cheng, *Sanhe xianzhi*, p. 641.
60. Lu Deyang and Wang Naining, *Shehui de you yi cengmian*, pp. 43–62.
61. Deng, "Liushi nian qian Beijingren," pp. 181–85.

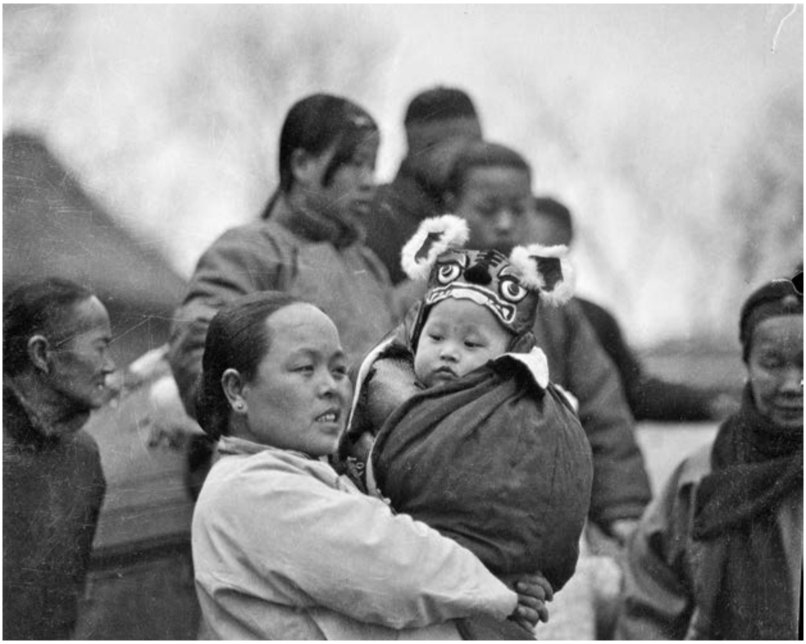

FIGURE 4. "Tiger Baby and Nurse." Sidney D. Gamble, photographer. Courtesy of Sidney D. Gamble Photographs, Archive of Documentary Arts, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University (462A_2662).

Some servants worked for private households on written fixed-term contracts; others had only an oral agreement with employers, which allowed them to start and stop work according to their individual financial need and family schedule.[62] The following criminal profile of an experienced trafficker named Cheng Huang Shi provides a revealing example. A widow with five children, Cheng Huang Shi was serving an eight-year term for abduction in Beijing Municipal Prison in 1930, when she gave an interview to sociologist Zhou Shuzhao. Zhou later published the interview in her Master's thesis at Yenching University, which is how we know of Cheng Huang Shi's forays into crime and her life and labors in Beijing.

Born into a peasant family in Beijing's suburbs, Cheng Huang Shi spent most of her adolescent years working on her parents' land. At the age of seventeen, she married a wagon driver, and together they had

62. Li Binsheng, "Laoma dian," p. 468.

five children. She had happy times watching her children grow up and seeing her eldest son get engaged and married; and she endured sad moments such as when her parents-in-law passed away. But it was the death of her husband in 1919 that turned her world upside down. At the age of thirty-nine, uneducated and unemployed, Cheng Huang Shi became the breadwinner of her family.[63] In order to get by, she began to develop her criminal knowledge and skills. For the next ten years or so, she plotted more than two dozen abduction cases and was involved in numerous other crimes. In between committing crimes, she worked as a domestic servant for weeks, and sometimes months, at a time. Among her employers were the manager of an electric warehouse, an officer of the warlord army, and a municipal official. It seems that domestic service work became something of a "safety net," supplementing Cheng Huang Shi's income while allowing her to work flexibly and providing her with free accommodation and meals.

In Ding Liu Shi's case, a domestic service job gave her a piece of work, a wage, a place to stay, and more importantly helped her set foot on her urban journey. But about half a year later in late 1938, she became sick and lost her job. Once again, her life was thrown into poverty and uncertainty. With no relatives in Beijing to whom she could turn for help, she packed up her belongings and moved into a room in a lower-class hostel to stay with her coworker. While recovering from her illness, Ding Liu Shi decided that she must find a long-term solution to ease her financial and psychological hardship. During this time, she became acquainted with a thirty-three-year-old man named Ding Baotian, who was also from her village. He worked on a few odd jobs in Beijing and was living in a nearby hostel. As their relationship developed, they decided to move out of their respective hostels and rent a room together. This was a wise decision in terms of pooling their financial resources and meeting their emotional needs; but it did not offer them a solution to their precarious livelihood. Under a stringent budget, they could only afford to rent a room at No. 11 Tongfasi Lane in the Outer-5 District, a place of squalor known as one of the notorious "eight stinking ditches" (*bada chougou* 八大臭溝) of Beijing. They lived together as a couple, and Ding Liu Shi later bore Ding Baotian a son. While Ding Liu Shi was managing her new family in Beijing, her husband, Ding Baoqi, had

63. Zhou Shuzhao, "Beiping youguai de yanjiu," p. 37.

returned to their village and had been busy looking for her. When in 1942 he finally found the couple, he filed a lawsuit in Beijing District Court accusing Ding Liu Shi of adultery.

Domestic service was, in a sense, an extension of a woman's family life and labor—it allowed a woman to live and work in a homely environment as a member of a surrogate family and to use domestic skills she already possessed, such as raising children, preparing meals, cleaning house, and doing laundry. The urban economy in early twentieth-century Beijing also accommodated other arrangements under which women's service labor was needed and valued. In 1928, local businesses, particularly restaurants and entertainment facilities, began to hire waitresses (*nü zhaodai* 女招待) to serve customers. The local business community supported this novel commercial practice and claimed that to do so was to "encourage women's employment and revitalize the city's commerce."[64] The first part of the claim might have been a trendy but empty slogan; nevertheless, the second part stemmed from real concerns. In June 1928, Beijing was stripped of its capital status and downgraded to a municipality under Hebei Province. The move of the capital to the south triggered an outflow of the bureaucratic class and thereby hit the city's business community hard, as they lost their most valued customers. By one statistic, the city's retail sector as a whole laid off nearly 15 percent of its employees in six months. The downward spiral continued into the next year. By June 1929, restaurant and food processing jobs dwindled by more than 35 percent, and the workforce in apparel was cut in half.[65] The dire situation forced businesses to take bold action to jumpstart the economy. Hiring waitresses was one solution.

In the following years, various types of local businesses filed applications with the Bureau of Social Affairs to register their newly recruited female workforce.[66] By 1932, the total number of registered waitresses in Beijing was 1,311: 87.4 percent (1,147 women) worked in 197 restaurants, 4.1 percent (54 women) in 18 teahouses, 6.5 percent (85 women) in 11

64. Zhang Ruyi, "Beiping de nü zhaodai," p. 6.

65. Lin, *Beiping shehui gaikuang tongjitu*.

66. In the period from 1930 to 1932, local businesses that hired waitresses included restaurants, teahouses, billiard halls, amusement parks, photographic shops, commercial publishers, fabric shops, sock factories, auction shops, mechanical shops, performance troupes, and women's bath houses. Wang Qin, "Jindai chengshi kongjian," p. 23.

billiard halls, and 1.9 percent (25 women) in 8 other types of businesses.[67] An official statistic on women's employment released by the Beijing Municipal Police Department in the spring of 1932 contended that more than 20 percent of employed women worked as waitresses.[68]

According to local newspapers, this new strategy was successful, and the restaurants that hired waitresses reportedly saw an increase in the number of customers and thus higher profits. More restaurants and shops followed suit, and some even installed advertising boards in front of their doors with slogans such as "waitresses are hired and satisfactory service is guaranteed" written in big characters.[69] Considering that the government in the early 1930s had not yet lifted the ban that prohibited women customers from mingling with men in public recreational facilities (e.g., in Peking Opera theaters and movie cinemas), having women serve tables understandably raised a considerable amount of curiosity and aroused even sexual fantasy among some male customers. Local tabloid newspapers opened a column devoted exclusively to anecdotes about waitresses and accounts of fraternizing with waitresses.

Waitresses' job responsibilities varied depending upon the nature of the business. Those working in billiard halls were usually responsible for cleaning the billiard tables, recording the score, and occasionally playing games with the male patrons.[70] For those working at restaurants, their jobs included receiving customers, handing out hot towels, cleaning tables, and serving tea.[71] A waitress's income came from two sources: a fixed, low base salary paid by the restaurant, and tips from customers. In the early 1930s, the monthly base salary was approximately two to six *yuan*, but the tips could amount to two or three times one's salary.[72]

Service work, either at public facilities or in private households, offered women a source of income; it was by no means a desired one, though. Domestic servants worked long hours from early morning,

67. Zhang Ruyi, "Beiping de nü zhaodai," pp. 7–9.
68. *Beiping chenbao* [Beijing morning daily], April 22, 1932. From Wang Qin, "Jindai chengshi kongjian," 36.
69. Zhang Ruyi, "Beiping de nü zhaodai," p. 39.
70. Wang Qin, "Jindai chengshi kongjian," p. 37.
71. Zhang Ruyi, "Beiping de nü zhaodai," p. 20.
72. *Beiping chenbao* [Beijing morning daily], August 8, 1932. From Wang Qin, "Jindai chengshi kongjian," p. 35.

before the master's family got up, to late night, after others rested. They were also expected to be on call throughout the day. Living with their employers, servants were under watchful eyes; their manner, voice, tone, and dress, to name just a few, could all be subject to scrutiny and discipline. Physical and sexual abuse was not uncommon under such circumstances. Therefore, women seemed to view domestic service as a temporary solution and their master's house as a temporary shelter, and came in and out as their fortunes turned.

Working as a waitress in a restaurant had its downside as well. Long hours were normal—women usually worked twelve to fourteen hours from morning to late evening, seven days a week. It was not unusual for a waitress to rent a room in a hotel nearby in order to save time on commuting between home and restaurant and to avoid walking long distances in inclement weather.[73] Sexual harassment was nothing but routine. A phrase—"to eat waitress" (*chi nü zhaodai* 吃女招待)—became a new slang expression suggesting a popular form of entertainment among some male customers. Although it could be understood literally as "to dine under a waitress's attendance," it carried a double meaning: the job of a waitress was to entertain customers using every possible means, which included sexual service if required. Officials at the Bureau of Social Affairs required waitresses to maintain "graceful" (*zhuangzhong* 莊重) behaviors and forbade "licentious manners" (*weixie xingzhuang* 猥褻行狀), but they were disappointed to find that most of these requirements fell on deaf ears and that businesses even viewed them as "nonsense" (*feihua* 廢話).[74]

It seems that one's marital status was not a particularly crucial factor during the hiring process. According to a study of 220 waitresses in early 1933, 90 of them were married, and among this cohort of married women, 32 had children.[75] Married women and even those with children had chances in this profession, as long as they were able to juggle work and family. The same study also found that 118 waitresses were under the age of nineteen, 92 were between the ages of twenty and twenty-nine, and only 10 were older than thirty.[76] Age would eventually

73. Zhang Ruyi, "Beiping de nü zhaodai," p. 20.
74. Wang Qin, "Jindai chengshi kongjian," p. 56.
75. Zhang Ruyi, "Beiping de nü zhaodai," pp. 13–16.
76. Ibid.

decide how long one could stay on the job, and thus the waitressing profession discriminated against married women in the long term.

Home Spaces, Work Places

Criminal case files and other sources show that a large number of female defendants (as well as plaintiffs and witnesses) did not hold regular paying jobs. For example, the Ministry of Justice of the Warlord Era (1912–27) released annual reports on crime, punishment, and prison in China. One of its agendas was to follow female inmates' employment patterns. The results show that among the female inmates serving sentences from 1914 to 1923, less than 9 percent held a manufacturing job before going to prison, and on average, approximately half of women inmates were unemployed before going to jail.[77] However, criminal case files bring to light not only the female unemployment rate, but also the complex connections between employment, work, and income in women's day-to-day struggles. In Chen Ma Shi's case discussed at the beginning of this chapter, although the official documents identify her as "unemployed," she actually did some domestic service work such as mending and washing clothes. Similar conflicting records with regard to women's employment can also be found in social research reports. In sociologist Zhou Shuzhao's 1929 survey of one hundred women inmates in the Beijing Municipal Prison, forty-four were jobless at the time they were arrested, but only twenty-nine women had never worked in their lives.[78] More importantly, the same survey shows that only fifty-six women held regular jobs, but as many as eighty-four women had some kind of income.[79] Thus, it appears that many women did not earn their income solely from formally held positions. If that was the case, how and where else did they earn the money to support themselves?

The proliferated handicraft industries in early twentieth-century Beijing offered women some informal work opportunities; it connected women's labors to the system of production and the international market

77. Zhang Jingyu, "Beijing sifabu fanzui tongji de fenxi," p. 266.
78. Zhou Shuzhao, "Beiping yibaiming nüfan de yanjiu," p. 296.
79. Ibid., p. 297.

without requiring them to work in a public and formal workplace. Not working collectively in handicraft workshops, the majority of them worked at home under the putting-out system to produce items such as embroideries, appliqués, rugs, and paper flowers. The embroidery trade is one example. In late imperial and early Republican Beijing, local people sewed wedding gowns, official attire and accessories for government officials, sedan chair cushions for rented carriages, and costumes and stage decorations for Peking Opera troupes.[80] By the 1930s, foreign orders surged. The new trade emphasized embroidered pieces such as curtains, sheets, tablecloths, table runners, pillow covers, and other ornamental items.[81] During the peak of production, hundreds of workshops in the city and dozens of dealers operated to meet the demands of foreign and domestic markets. But this rapidly developing industry and profitable trade retained a small regular workforce, just several hundred professional embroiderers. By comparison, more than 50,000 women were estimated to have worked informally in the trade and relied upon it to supplement family income.[82]

The production cycle began with merchants bringing orders to embroidery dealers (*xiuzhuang* 繡庄). Then dealers took orders to and divided the production work between embroidery workshops (*xiuzuo* 繡作) and middlemen such as sub-contractors (*chengtou ren* 承頭人) and labor recruiters (*baotou ren* 包頭人). Workshops normally kept a small but skilled workforce of embroidery workers (*xiugong* 繡工), who lived inside workshops and were paid on a piecework basis. Such an arrangement helped workshops cut operating costs, especially when business was slow; and when demand surged, they could focus on the essential tasks such as making design patterns (*huayang* 花樣) and processing embroidery canvases (*ruanpian* 軟片) while outsourcing smaller and simpler work to others. More women participated in the embroidery production not as contracted workers but as independent laborers working under the putting-out system operated by sub-contractors and labor recruiters. Through these middlemen, women obtained designs and silk materials from workshops. While working, women placed the canvas on a four-sided wooden frame and bound it to a level platform,

80. Catherine Vance Yeh, "Where is the Center of Cultural Production?"
81. Jin Shoushen, *Lao Beijing de shenghuo*, pp. 355–57.
82. Tao Ziliang, "Yi jiating funü wei zhuli de tiaobu xiuhuaye," p. 195.

the size of which varied according to the size of the canvas. The canvas was tied securely to the frame using twine. Women sat with their legs crossed on a brick bed, twisted the yarn into a fine tip, put it through the embroidery needle, and then ran the needle upwards and downwards through the canvas. The number of canvases women could complete and the difficulty of each piece determined their pay rate.[83]

Working at the bottom rung of the production process, women were unlikely to rise out of a subordinate role in terms of both the gender system and household economy. The employment principles of the handicraft industry conformed to traditional Chinese social norms and gender ideals, which did not necessarily encourage women to pursue a career away from home but unequivocally praised anyone who "worked diligently with her hand and body."[84] Women's participation in the massive handicraft production was more or less an extension of their domestic tasks. Although women went from stitching for themselves and for family members to stitching for business sales, the income they earned was meager, unsteady, and insufficient to support an independent life away from home and parents. Quite the opposite, the handicraft work strengthened women's ties to household labor and allowed them to make a contribution to the household economy. In other words, handicraft dealers and families, not women themselves, controlled both the process and the result of women's labors.

Furthermore, the handicraft work under the putting-out system did not migrate the female workforce to factories and transform them into an industrial working class. The experience of Western industrialization, as practiced in America and European countries, shows that the putting-out system disintegrated over time as merchants looked for means to achieve a greater degree of supervision, maximum control over workers' productivity, and better quality control. Factories ultimately uprooted workshops; contracted workers replaced independent laborers. Yet, the putting-out system in Beijing continued until the 1950s; and its eventual demise was not a result of capital gain or market economy. The system ended because the newly established Communist state, after taking over a war-torn city, sought quick solutions to the city's rampant poverty and aimed to enlist women's productive labor

83. Jin Shoushen, *Lao Beijing de shenghuo*, p. 355.
84. Ko, *Every Step a Lotus*, p. 15.

to build the socialist economy. The Communist economic planners deemed the putting-out system inefficient and outdated, bound to be demolished. In its place, a policy initiative was introduced, which was to first organize women into neighborhood cooperative workshops, then merge workshops into larger operations, and finally recruit women to work in handicraft factories. The putting-out system ultimately gave way to the socialist collective economy.

Exploited by dealers and middlemen, women in the handicraft industry were not at a complete loss. Working from home and at their own pace, they could better budget their time to balance work with domestic chores. They also stayed away from problems such as long hours, dirty and unsafe working conditions, and sexual harassment, which were all too common in factories. More importantly, through participating in handicraft production, women were able to build vibrant neighborhood communities. They not only worked at home but also did most of the legwork such as handing out work orders and collecting finished pieces. The latter tasks gave women chances to walk from door to door and make frequent contact with "young married women and grown-up teenage girls" (*shaofu zhangnü* 少婦長女).[85] Contacts with neighbors allowed women to cooperate and coordinate their work without subjecting themselves to strict factory discipline; and the neighborhood-based production structure made the handicraft industry in Beijing more resilient and adaptive to price changes and market fluctuations.

When they were not working for the local handicraft industry, women could utilize their domestic skills—mending, sewing, washing, ironing, and altering clothes—to gain petty cash. Women mending clothes on street corners or collecting laundry from door to door in commercial districts was a common scene in early twentieth-century Beijing. According to Sidney Gamble's study of 283 Chinese families in the late 1920s, among ninety-eight women who contributed to family income, fifty-eight did so by sewing and washing clothes.[86] The local colloquial language called the work *fengqiong* 縫窮, which can be translated as "mending *for* the poor" or "mending *by* the poor," and implies a relatively dire economic relationship between the service provider and

85. Gao and Gao, "Huashi shuwang," p. 14.
86. Gamble, *How Chinese Families Live in Peiping*, p. 317.

Figure 5. "Seamstresses Sewing Outdoors Next to a Hostel and a Building with a Sign Offering to Buy Pawn Tickets and Second-hand Clothing." Hedda Morrison, photographer. Photo courtesy of Hedda Morrison Photographs of China, Harvard-Yenching Library (HM20.1655).

her customers. Women who offered mending work usually sat with a shallow basket containing needle and thread on the doorsteps outside of shops in business areas, waiting for customers to show up. The majority of their patrons were shop assistants and apprentices who were young men sojourning in Beijing without their families. They occasionally needed help with patching clothing, sewing socks, unpicking and washing cotton padded coats and quilts, and doing miscellaneous needlework.[87] Women sat on street corners carefully scanning the garments of every passerby for a hole or loose button that they could mend (see fig. 5).[88] To maximize income, these women would also collect dirty clothes to wash at home. Their customers would then either pick up the clean clothes themselves or have it brought back to them. This kind of work

87. Qu, *Lao Beijing de jietou xiangwei*, pp. 141–43.
88. Zhao Chunxiao, *Jingcheng jiushi zatan*, pp. 42–43.

did not require skills beyond what the women had already learned, and it also did not interrupt the women's own domestic duties; thus, it naturally became a popular source of supplementary income for women.

Work, Sex, and Sex Work

Foreigners noticed the busy economic activities that characterized lower-class women's home life. For instance, Fannie S. Wickes, a social worker affiliated with the American Board Mission in Beijing in 1920, ventured into a Chinese neighborhood adjacent to her church to pursue an interview. While there, she found that most Chinese residents came from the laboring class: shoemakers, rickshaw pullers, and barbers.[89] But what drew Wickes's attention was not those male residents, but women in the neighborhood—wives, mothers, daughters, concubines, prostitutes, and slave girls, and their busy daily lives on the social and economic margins. Staying at home, not gainfully employed, many women nevertheless worked literally around the clock. Wickes's field notes show that, for example, at No. 3, the rickshaw owner's wife, "a plump, white-haired woman," helped "drudge for the family and wash the ricksha(w) seat covers."[90] Her daughter-in-law "manage[d] the ricksha[w] business" and sometimes "quarrel[ed] with her blind father-in-law."[91] Women fitted their productive and reproductive labor to men's daily work and life routines and, as a "useful member" of the family, contributed their share of family support.

As she continued her interview, Wickes began to encounter other disturbing elements of women's life in the neighborhood. She found at the third gate on the east of the alleyway lived "the purchased concubine" who was a "good looking, young woman" but her "wide and spreading collar marked her as an immoral woman."[92] Her husband was unaccounted for and she lived with her "cross-eyed girl of five" and

89. Wickes, "My nearest neighbors in Peking," in Gamble, *Peking: A Social Survey*, pp. 331–32.
90. Ibid., p. 331.
91. Ibid., p. 332.
92. Ibid., p. 333.

a "shorter, plumper woman with the same style of collar."[93] Apparently the concubine and her company were not the only "immoral" women that Wickes encountered in the neighborhood. Her field notes record a bizarre incident that happened between her and a family in mourning. On the morning after she visited three daughters who had just lost their father, Wickes opened her door and found one of the daughters "in the unbleached, undyed garments of mourning" standing at her doorstep. To her surprise, the daughter begged her to "buy their house or take a mortgage on it."[94] Upon hearing the sad stories and "other things calculated to excite pity," Wickes remained calm and began to question the young daughter's sincerity. Eventually, she sent the daughter away without promising any further help. Later Wickes found her suspicion was warranted as she learned that "all three girls were prostituted by their father, the older two long since and the younger for two years or more."[95] After this incident, she ran into the two older sisters several times in the alleyway: "[t]he oldest sister may often be seen standing in the group of men, stitching at a shoe-sole. The second sister has recently gone to a public house of prostitution in a city nearby."[96]

Wickes did not further investigate those morally ambiguous elements in the Chinese neighborhood. As an outsider and a social worker, she neither had enough resources to verify her troubling findings, nor did she claim enough authority to try to correct those behaviors. But her field notes reveal her serious concerns over the visible distance between the moral standard she upheld and some women residents' code of conduct. These women seemingly understood that their productive labor was not the only asset with which they could earn a living. In a city where sex trade and growing entertainment facilities (restaurants, dance halls, cafés, and billiard rooms) propelled male sexual fantasies and ideas about consumption of a woman's body, prostitution developed as an exchange relationship in which women expected financial favor by fulfilling men's desire for sensual pleasures. Sex work thus became a form of seasonal job that helped some women cope with sudden family budget crises.

93. Ibid.
94. Ibid.
95. Ibid.
96. Ibid.

Prostitutes worked in both public and home spaces. In the public arena, the sex trade developed rapidly in early twentieth-century Beijing. In 1912, there were 355 licensed brothels operating within the boundaries of the city. The number grew steadily over the following years, and by 1917 there were 373 licensed brothels citywide.[97] The recession in the late 1920s, in particular after 1928 when Beijing lost its status as a national capital to Nanjing, affected the prostitution industry. But unlike other service sectors that were severely impacted, the prostitution industry's profit only declined slightly. A total number of 395 brothels continued to operate citywide.[98] The sex trade survived the Japanese invasion in 1937 and, in fact, thrived during the occupation. By 1944 the number of licensed brothels in Beijing increased to 460, which included 100 first-class "small singing bands" (*qingyin xiaoban* 輕吟小班), 100 second-class "teahouses" (*chashi* 茶室), 220 third-class "indecent places" (*xiachu* 下處), and 40 fourth-class "small indecent places" (*xiao xiachu* 小下處).[99]

Brothels and prostitutes proliferated, and this prompted government officials to intervene to regulate prostitution and sexuality. The 1921 social survey by Sidney Gamble has offered by far the most comprehensive depiction of municipal policies toward prostitution in Beijing in the early Republican era prior to the GMD's rule. Prostitution was firmly condemned in official rhetoric and moral reform initiatives, but not outlawed. The Beijing Municipal Police Department spelled out and implemented a fairly detailed set of regulations over key issues such as the application and renewal of brothel licenses, their daily operations, registration of prostitutes, medical examinations, and prostitutes' behavior in public. Gamble wrote:

> The police keep a careful check on everything connected with the business of prostitution, having a special department for the registration of all brothels and prostitutes. Before any brothel can be opened a permit must be secured from the police and no permits in excess of the number allowed by the police regulations will be issued, no one who has been in jail is allowed to act as manager of a house of prostitution, no brothels are

97. Gamble, *Peking: A Social Survey*, p. 247.
98. Du, "Ershi shiji sanshi niandai de Beiping chengshi guanli."
99. BPSJCJ, J181-16-91, "Xiuzheng Beijing tebieshi zhengfu jingchaju guanli yuehu guize" [Revised police regulations for brothels and prostitutes], 1944.

> allowed to have windows or porches facing on the street nor can they be decorated too highly, a list of all prostitutes and maid servants must be filed with the police, and all changes must be promptly reported; furthermore the house manager must immediately notify the police in case any of the customers are known to be fugitives from justice, to be carrying firearms, to be drunk, or whenever there is any fight or disturbance. No house manager is allowed to beat any prostitute cruelly, to force her to receive customers, borrow her clothes, take from her any money given her, prevent her going from one house to another or even leaving the business if she so desires. All prostitutes suffering from venereal disease must be sent to the hospital.[100]

These regulations were modified first by GMD officials and then officials of the collaborationist government; but it seems that the only major change officials made was to increase the number of brothel licenses, which suggests that the sex trade expanded despite political turmoil and the cash-strapped municipal governments were eager to exploit tax revenue on brothel and prostitute licenses.[101]

Licensed brothels in Beijing were concentrated in a few areas, on the same streets as retail businesses and entertainment facilities. Most first-class and second-class brothels clustered in the Qianmen area, immediately south of the inner city, serving upper- and middle-class patrons (see fig. 6). According to police records, there were twenty-seven brothels prior to 1928. Under the GMD's rule from 1928 to 1937, forty-three new brothels were opened in the district. Another fifty-eight brothels started operating during the first four years of Japanese occupation, which brought the number of brothels in the district to 128 in 1941. But just a few kilometers further south, lower-class brothels mingled with various forms of cheap entertainment.

Police records and sociological research suggest that the registered prostitutes consisted of women from the young and charming to the old

100. Gamble, *Peking: A Social Survey*, p. 248.

101. For official policies toward prostitution under the GMD's rule in Beijing, see Mai Qianzeng, "*Beiping changji diaocha,*" and Cheng, *City of Working Women*. In the book *Bada hutong li de chenyuan jiushi* (A carnal history of the eight big lanes), author Zhang Jinqi explores the inner world of prostitution in the infamous brothel district in the Qianmen area in Republican Beijing. Christian Henriot's and Gail Hershatter's books on prostitution in Shanghai offer a case of regional comparison. Henriot, *Prostitution and Sexuality in Shanghai*; Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*.

Figure 6. "Prostitute Signs." Sidney D. Gamble, photographer. Courtesy of Sidney D. Gamble Photographs, Archive of Documentary Arts, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University (272A_1556).

and plain. The services they offered varied from attending social gatherings and dinner parties to sexual services. Social reformers' writings often emphasized the hierarchical rule within the brothel by depicting prostitutes as slaves to their owners and managers. The brothel indeed instituted a set of regulatory systems determining the prostitutes' daily regimens and even the paths their lives would take for many years to come. Young girls from poor families were brought by their parents, or kidnapped by traffickers, from the countryside to Beijing and sold to brothels. They were raised and trained at a brothel, and as soon as they were physically ready they began to entertain patrons (*jieke* 接客). Prostitutes might hope to one day redeem their bodies (*shushen* 贖身) and begin a free life. However, because redemption usually cost a substantial sum of money, especially when the prostitute was relatively young, many women could only either hope to be taken as a concubine by a wealthy man or wait until they grew old and less costly to be purchased as a wife by a man who was economically less privileged.

Women and girls who fell into prostitution were at the mercy of their kidnappers, brothel managers, pimps, and patrons.[102]

Mindful of this formal sex industry home-based in brothels, we see that criminal case files bring to light the versatility of the sex trade in Beijing that allowed for other forms of work arrangements for women to practice prostitution. In one case, twenty-three-year-old Wu Wu Shi ran away from home in December of 1943. During the following six months, her husband Wu Kuilian, a thirty-two-year-old rickshaw puller, kept looking for her. On May 13, 1944, while he pulled his rickshaw into a narrow lane, he caught sight of a woman walking towards him. Wu Kuilian identified her instantly as his wife and stopped her. He asked her to return home with him, but Wu Wu Shi refused. An altercation ensured. Patrolling police officers showed up and arrested the pair, and a few days later Wu Wu Shi stood trial for adultery in Beijing District Court.[103] Part of the court investigation read:

Q: You (Wu Wu Shi) ran out of home to *hunshi* 混事. Did your husband know that?
A: My husband knew that I ran out to *hunshi*.
Q: Why did you run out?
A: He (Wu Kuilian) couldn't make ends meet by pulling a rickshaw, so he told me to *hunshi*.

Hunshi is a compound word combining the verb *hun* 混 (to muddle along, to drift along) with the noun *shi* 事 (matter, business, work). In early twentieth-century Beijing, *shi* was a popular word describing a job or people engaged in the job: *zhaoshi* 找事 (to look for a job), *zuoshi* 做事 (to work on a job), and *wushi* 無事 (unemployed). Though *shi* had a broad meaning in colloquial language, the word *hunshi* in Beijing in the 1940s referred specifically and explicitly to prostitution.

But, unlike the registered prostitutes who were "owned" by brothels, Wu Wu Shi engaged in the sex trade as a casual and seasonal laborer. The first time she left home to *hunshi* was in April 1943. Her husband found her a brothel in Sishengmiao Lane where, according to a survey

102. Wang Shunu, *Zhongguo changji shi*; Mai Qianzeng, "Beiping changji diaocha."
103. BPDFFY, J65-8-3574, Wu Wu Shi, 1944.

conducted by the Bureau of Social Affairs, twenty-two third-class brothels lined both sides of the narrow alleyway. Together these brothels received around 1,700 customers every day.[104] As soon as Wu Wu Shi started working there, the brothel paid her husband one hundred *yuan*. It was not clear whether there was a contract signed between Wu Wu Shi and the brothel specifying a fixed period of service. Then two months later in June Wu Wu Shi made her own decision to stop *hunshi*, because she felt that she would not make enough money by working at that brothel. Following four months at home, without consulting her husband, Wu Wu Shi went out to *hunshi* again from October to December of 1943.

Seasonal prostitutes like Wu Wu Shi entered the sex trade when their families or they themselves were in dire need of money, and they left when their financial situation ameliorated. The terms of the sex trade were flexible enough to accommodate different arrangements. Women could choose to negotiate a period of service lasting from weeks to months and then receive cash payment from a brothel in advance (*shiqian yazhang* 使錢壓賬), to work under an oral agreement of sharing a certain percentage of their income with the brothel (*zihun* 自混), or to work as prostitutes who did not register with the government (*anchang* 暗娼) and who provided sex services at home or in a "rented shed" (*anfangzi* 暗房子). By operating outside the regulatory framework of the state and brothels, women could avoid paying fees to either of them and retain the maximum earnings in her pocket. These seasonal and informal prostitutes were referred to as "private prostitutes" (*sichang* 私娼), "floating prostitutes" (*youchang* 游娼), "unregistered prostitutes" (*sanchang* 散娼), and "wild chicks" (*yeji* 野雞). All of these terms suggest a restless state of existence that had not yet come fully under the scrutiny of government surveillance.[105]

Besides practicing prostitution in the home space, women also discovered and refined their sexual appeal at home before joining the pervasive sex trade in public entertainment facilities. One day in the mid-1940s, the police arrested a twenty-seven-year-old woman, Zhang Lizhen, because they suspected her of operating a criminal enterprise of trafficking

104. BPSSHJ, J2-7-483, "Waiwuqu changji diaochabiao" [Prostitution in the Outer-5 district], 1943.
105. Zhao Chunxiao, *Jingcheng jiushi zatan*, pp. 76–77.

women into prostitution. One of the alleged victims was a fifteen-year-old girl named Zhang Junming. Police believed that Zhang Lizhen had spent 300 *yuan* to purchase the teenage girl from her mother. According to the police report, she first asked the teenager to learn to dance and later sold her to a restaurant in Shacheng in western Hebei Province. While making the arrest, the police incidentally found another four teenage girls living with Zhang Lizhen in her home; all were possibly victims of the criminal enterprise. Zhang Lizhen denied all allegations during the police interrogation. She claimed that she was a dancing girl herself and had been in the profession for more than ten years, since she was seventeen. While working in a dance hall, she ran a dance class at home and these teenage girls, including Zhang Junming, were her trainees.[106]

Dance halls emerged in Beijing in the early 1930s. In the beginning, the majority of the dancing girls came from China's southern and eastern coasts where dance halls had been a popular form of entertainment for years.[107] Zhang Lizhen, a Ningbo native from Zhejiang Province, was among those who came to Beijing hoping to make a living as a dancer. About one year after Zhang Lizhen arrived in Beijing, dance halls became authorized businesses and began to pay commercial tax to the Municipal Government. Besides giving performances in dance halls, these girls often offered classes to people who either aspired to enter the profession or were just interested in taking up a new recreational activity.[108] Despite some early interest, it seems that dance halls in Beijing never appealed to a wider circle beyond a small group of foreigners, college students, and local Chinese who worked for foreign businesses and cultural institutions. By 1943, there were only thirteen dance halls operating in Beijing; most were located in the eastern part of the downtown area close to some of the city's famous foreign landmarks. Zhang Lizhen testified that over the course of ten years, she had worked in five different dance halls. The one she attended then was called the Sino-West Dance Hall (Zhongxi wuting 中西舞廳), which a foreign businessman had invested in. It could hold sixty people; but the hall was normally only at one-third of total capacity according to the business record.[109] A low customer turnout

106. BPDFFY, J65-6-1930, Tao Heng Shi, 1940.
107. Wang Qin, "Jindai chengshi kongjian," p. 41.
108. Ibid., p. 42.
109. BPDFFY, J65-6-1930, Tao Heng Shi, 1940.

meant that Zhang Lizhen had to take in trainees at home just to supplement her income.

Having worked as a dancer for ten years, Zhang Lizhen must understand well how a woman's sexual appeal, more than anything else in that profession, could propel or weaken her career; she considered this when she selected trainees for her home school and chose a career path for them. She told the police that she made friends with another dancing girl named Tao Yuming when they both worked at the Olympia Dance Hall (Aolin piya wuting 奧林匹亞舞廳), and she related the story of how she had come to adopt Zhang Junming. One day in 1940, Zhang Lizhen stopped at Tao Yuming's home to chat. The latter's mother, Tao Heng Shi, happened to be at home, too, and joined in their conversation. Tao Heng Shi told Zhang Lizhen about an impoverished mother and her starving daughter in the neighborhood. She wondered whether Zhang Lizhen could take in the daughter. Zhang Lizhen replied that she currently "didn't have enough trainees under her" (*shenxia faren* 身下乏人) and she might be able to adopt the girl as her "daughter." However, she would have to set up a date and see what the girl looked like. After seeing that the girl looked "not bad" (*bu'e* 不惡), Zhang Lizhen kept her word and adopted the poor woman's daughter. She changed her given name to Junming, bought medicine to treat her illness, and took her to the dancing class. However, things did not turn out as Zhang Lizhen had planned. When Zhang Junming finished her class, she had learned a lot of dancing routines. But owing to the malnourishment she experienced in her childhood, she, as Zhang Lizhen noticed, was too short to work at the dance hall. She was then sent to work as a waitress in a restaurant.

The two career options—dancing girl or waitress—that Zhang Lizhen prepared her trainees to undertake show that the expansion of the urban entertainment industry offered women new work opportunities and bolstered the value of the neighborhood as a worksite. For Zhang Lizhen and her trainee Zhang Junming, the home space provided a range of possibilities. It offered Zhang Lizhen a business opportunity to run training classes to supplement her lukewarm dancing career, while giving Zhang Junming a learning opportunity that introduced her to a modern form of recreation and offered her relief from poverty. But the skills and knowledge acquired at these types of home businesses did not guarantee a woman her social autonomy and economic independence;

they also did not conform to the rules of ethical and virtuous behavior and were not counted among the respectable career paths promoted by the government. Instead, they aimed to meet the market demand of women's sexual labor and, in the process, they helped some women to achieve some level of financial assurance. At the same time, these practices contributed to the commodification of women, a process which involved the integration of women's bodies, their hopes and livelihoods, with the larger world of urban entertainment and sex trade.

Conclusion

Let us return to Chen Ma Shi's case that opens this chapter. On February 26, 1947, she and Rong Xianzong were convicted of adultery. But because adultery was not a serious offense and because they had committed their crime before December 31, 1946, the two were released from prison under the newly enacted Statute of Pardon (*Dashe tiaoli* 大赦條例). In the last court document of Chen Ma Shi's case—the official sentence—she was still recorded as "unemployed" despite her repeated testimony about her past work experience and her current job. The *zhiye* registration in her case and the larger *zhiye* discourse offer us a window through which to study the ways in which global knowledge of urban political economy became a local discourse of woman's livelihood and personhood. It also sheds light on how such local discourse was driven by the politicized view of local reality and practice of social engineering. Since the late Qing, municipal officials and social reformers in Beijing and elsewhere had customarily regarded "employment" as a regular paying job embedded in the industrial economy and capitalist mode of production. It required professional training, working in public spaces, and performing specialized tasks under industrial rules and supervision. In this regard, it seems that Chen Ma Shi's months-long experience as a domestic servant in 1945 and her work mending and washing at the time she was arrested in mid-1946 was not regular enough, professional enough, or "industrial" enough to fit into the official notion of employment.

Chen Ma Shi's "employment status" probably disappointed municipal officials and social reformers' expectation of women's labor and

personhood in relation to the urban political economy; but to her, the flexible pattern of work offered tangible benefits. Domestic service was probably the most common form of paid employment for poor women like Chen Ma Shi. Other kinds of paid work available to them were either extensions of household work or involved the sex trade. Most commonly, poor women worked at different jobs throughout the year or worked on multiple jobs simultaneously to maximize their income. There was a wide spectrum of jobs for which women, especially married women, could find themselves valuable. It had been so for a long period of time. Francesca Bray and Kenneth Pomeranz have persuasively shown that women's productive labor, particularly in handicraft production, was a crucial part of imperial household economy in China and connected women to larger market networks.[110]

However, *zhiye* as an industrial knowledge and impulse of social reform and social engineering sustained an official discourse that re-imagined women's lives, identities, and the perceived power dynamic within the family. For a woman with a *zhiye*, the world could be divided into two opposing zones, the workplace and the home. Her time could be divided into work time and leisure. The notion of "profession" fractured the household unit of production and differentiated productive labor and gainful employment from reproductive labor and housework. It became a new ground upon which collective identities and class consciousness could grow. In modern China, the *zhiye* discourse demonstrated its powerful political potential and engendered a top-down reform and revolutionary campaign, a process to produce disciplined and productive subjects for the Chinese revolutionary nation-state. The *zhiye* movement centered the nation-state building on the site of woman's labor, and women were remunerated for their labors. In contrast, unstable, flexible, and low wage work patterns did not have the power to transform women into politically conscious citizens, at least not according to the formulators of *zhiye* discourse. But they enabled lower-class women to combine their multiple roles and responsibilities, and to earn cash to alleviate some economic pressures on their household economy. Such interplay between the official *zhiye* discourse and survival tactics became an essential part of Chinese women's experience of political, economic, and cultural modernity.

110. Bray, *Technology and Gender*; Pomeranz, "Women's Work."

CHAPTER TWO

The Politics of Dependency

It was early spring in 1943. Times were tough for twenty-nine-year-old rickshaw puller Guo Xihou, his wife Guo Yang Shi, and their son. Earlier in the year, the price of wheat flour had risen by more than 70 percent. Then the Municipal Government ordered the rationing of wheat flour, corn flour, and millet in an effort to weather the growing food crisis. Before the measure took effect, the market was further disrupted as the government launched a drastic currency reform. This series of financial crises took its toll on the Guos' marriage. One day in late March 1943, a neighbor, thirty-four-year-old Li Zheng Shi, visited Guo Yang Shi. As they chatted for a while, the conversation centered upon Guo Yang Shi's difficult life. The neighbor proposed to find her a new husband, a financially solvent one, to rescue her from her dire situation. Li Zheng Shi also promised Guo Yang Shi that Guo Xihou would be compensated forty *yuan* for his loss.[1] Guo Yang Shi was persuaded, so she woke up her husband, who was in another room napping. After hearing about Li Zheng Shi's proposal, Guo Xihou was infuriated and drove the neighbor out immediately.

Nothing happened in the following days, as life seemed to continue on as usual for the couple. Guo Xihou pulled his rickshaw to earn a meager income, and his wife stayed at home taking care of their young child. But on April 9, Guo Xihou returned home after a hard day's work to find his wife and son missing. Recalling the incident that had

1. Scholars and government agencies recorded price by Chinese currency. In the period from 1912 to 1949, the major bank notes circulated in Beijing were Silver Dollar (*yinyuan*, 1912–35), Legal Tender (*fabi* 法幣, 1935–37, 1945–48), Federal Reserve Note (*lianyinquan* 聯銀券, 1938–45), and Golden Yuan (*jinyuanquan* 金元券, 1948–49).

occurred a few days ago, he worried that his wife might have run away from home and taken their son with her. He immediately reported this to the police precinct office and identified the neighbor, Li Zheng Shi, as the troublemaker who had instigated his wife's desertion. Two weeks later, officers found the runaway wife together with her son. On April 24, Guo Xihou filed a complaint at Beijing District Court accusing Li Zheng Shi of abducting his wife.[2]

During the first court hearing, Li Zheng Shi defended herself by insisting that she did not abduct Guo Yang Shi but only wanted to help her out after the desperate woman complained to her of "lack of spousal support" (*buyang* 不養). It is impossible to count the exact number of women in wartime Beijing who chose to abandon their husbands in order to obtain financial security; but Guo Yang Shi's dire economic situation, her elopement, and her plea of "lack of spousal support" are characteristic of the types of incidents reported to the police involving runaway wives. Terms like "lack of a source of livelihood" (*wuyou shenghuo* 無有生活), "the source of livelihood is uncertain" (*shenghuo wuzhuo* 生活無著), or "[he] does not care about my livelihood" (*bugu shenghuo* 不顧生活) appear frequently in legal proceedings. Moreover, Kathryn Bernhardt, who has studied divorce lawsuits in this period, observes that as many as 51 percent of women who sought legal divorce did so on the grounds of lack of financial support.[3] These cases bring to light the intricate connections between economic instability, emotional satisfaction, and familial integrity in an extraordinary time of war, foreign occupation, and financial crisis.

The Japanese occupation of Beijing had entered its sixth year by 1943, when the Japanese army held firm control over major cities in north China. Despite the strength of its political governance, however, the occupation authority could not manage the deteriorating economy, which was weakening the regime's financial foundation and eroding people's livelihoods. Government statistics record a precipitous economic downturn during the wartime years. The retail price of wheat flour, for instance, rose almost 4,300 times from 1937 to 1945, and price spikes for other daily necessities were common.[4] The situation

2. BPDFFY, J65-7-3123, Li Zheng Shi, 1943.
3. Bernhardt, "Women and the Law," p. 206.
4. BPSJ, J211-1-4, "Beijing pifa wujia zhishu diaochabiao" [Wholesale price index in Beijing], 1945.

in the final two years of the occupation appears most devastating, as prices rose almost tenfold and the number of bank notes issued doubled within just four months—from August to December 1945.[5] The rampant inflation was halted temporarily when the GMD took over following the surrender of Japan. But prices rose again in 1946 and then skyrocketed; it was not until the end of the Civil War in early 1949 that the situation ameliorated.

To date, most studies on wartime inflation in China have focused on the final years of the Civil War in the late 1940s and its political consequences. Historians have argued that the economic crisis played a critical role in the demise of the GMD regime and contributed to the landslide Communist victory in 1949.[6] But inflation in Beijing had gained momentum years before the Civil War. More importantly, inflation is more than an issue of monetary policy and an episode of economic downturn; instead, as Bernd Widdig's work on the great inflation in Weimar Germany describes, it represents "a grand metaphor that captures the enormous cultural and psychological dislocations and changes in attitudes."[7] Focusing on lower-class women's personal experiences with runaway inflation and wartime shortages, this chapter attempts to explore the ways in which women like Guo Yang Shi and Li Zheng Shi made sense of their hardship through daily struggles for food, clothing, shelter, and stability. Their reactions to the insecurities, uncertainties, and anxieties generated by financial pressures illuminate the social and cultural conditions that both informed and lent legitimacy to women's survival tactics. It also brings to light how survival tactics shaped individual women's and men's conceptualizations of issues such as the source of a woman's livelihood, the choices available to her when her livelihood was in danger, and the financial constitution of a married couple. Although those heart-wrenching but sketchy accounts recorded in legal proceedings may not help us quantify inflation and poverty, they do allow us to understand how inflation took shape in individual women's lives.

5. Arthur Young, *China's Wartime Finance and Inflation,* pp. 303–4.
6. For the political consequences of inflation during the Sino-Japanese War and the final years of GMD rule, see Arthur Young, *China's Wartime Finance and Inflation*; Chou, *The Chinese Inflation*; and Eastman, *Seeds of Destruction*.
7. Widdig, *Culture and Inflation in Weimar Germany*, p. 22.

As criminal case files show, the sustained economic crisis in wartime Beijing threatened the well-being of many families and deprived women of the chance to be economically independent. It played a crucial role in shaping the ways poor women of the time conceptualized the domestic economic structure and the pattern of household authority. To them, marriage was a union based on support, and support was primarily a husband's responsibility. In other words, women viewed men as economic providers, expected their husbands to provide financial security for the household, and were willing to accept his authority over household matters in return for a guarantee of economic well-being.

Such hierarchical configuration of domestic support came under attack in the family reform movement since the late Qing.[8] To social reformers and lawmakers, the very notion of man as provider and woman as his dependent not only represented everything that was wrong with the Chinese family system but also perpetuated women's subjugation. The reform efforts and new legislation brought about by reform movements since the 1920s promoted women's independence as well as redefined the family as a union of two equal individuals on the basis of mutual support; but this official ideal did not reflect the reality amongst people of the lower social classes. As we have seen in records of criminal proceedings, the wartime economic crisis allowed the customary configuration of a hierarchical family structure to retain its influence. One of women's survival tactics was their observance of the domestic hierarchy. Thus, it can be argued that the wives in Beijing absconded not to challenge the hierarchical pattern of household authority but to protest their husbands' failure to fulfill their economic obligations. In a time of war and economic crisis, this kind of hierarchy placed enormous pressure on the husband to provide financial support to his dependent spouse in order to establish his household authority. And so when external circumstances undermined their financial solvency, many men found their relationships in jeopardy. In the end, the conventional family hierarchy that was supposed to bolster their dominance in family affairs rendered the men victims of failed relationships.

8. Lang, *Chinese Family and Society*; Levy, *The Family Revolution*; and Glosser, *Chinese Visions of Family and State*.

Money Matters

Beijing's economy followed a downward trajectory over the course of the early twentieth century. The city, as chapter 1 has shown, never developed a robust manufacturing economy despite successive attempts by various administrations of the Municipal Government. Commerce and service sectors were instead the city's economic backbone. As Madeleine Yue Dong points out, inter-regional and international trade propelled the local commerce and service sectors; but neither was immune to repeated political turmoil and the sustained economic crisis it brought about.[9] For example, the Boxer Uprising in 1900 and the collapse of the Qing dynasty in 1911 brought the economy to a standstill. Then warlord fighting in the 1920s frequently disrupted market activities. The city lost its status as the national capital in 1928, and in the subsequent years it witnessed a tremendous decline in government funding and expenditures and "an exodus of bureaucrats and their families, who had formed the wealthier part of the Beijing population."[10] The economic hardship created a continuing crisis of poverty, which shaped the city's social geography. Sociologists in the 1920s and 1930s "ranked poverty as Beijing's most 'important and glaring' problem, the 'main breeding ground for other social evils,' and the 'chief force lowering public morality and undermining public welfare.'"[11] Before government officials and the sociological research community found solutions to address poverty and pauperization in Beijing, the Sino-Japanese War erupted and caused further turmoil on markets. The following wartime economic crisis was merely one episode of this long-term decline. The crisis affected almost every resident in the city and pervaded all aspects of domestic life. The criminal cases outlined below help us fathom the tremendous impact of poverty on lower-class women's everyday experiences.

In 1932, fifteen-year-old Niu Hu Shi married twenty-two-year-old Niu Guangrong in Beijing. Four years later, Niu Guangrong joined the Nationalist army and soon afterwards was deployed to Shandong Province. Before leaving Beijing, he promised Niu Hu Shi that he would send home a portion of his stipend to support her and their son.

9. Madeleine Yue Dong, *Republican Beijing*, p. 106.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid. p. 214.

When Japan invaded Beijing in July 1937, Niu Guangrong was stationed hundreds of miles behind the front, far from the initial battles. From this position of relative safety, Niu Guangrong had been able to keep his word and always managed to send some money back to Niu Hu Shi, who still lived in Beijing. But the situation changed in early 1938. By then the Japanese army in north China had taken over Beijing and a handful of other important cities in the region, and it was preparing to launch a massive offensive to advance south and join forces with other Japanese troops that were attacking China from the east coast. Under pressure from the advancing Japanese army, Niu Guangrong's battalion was ordered to build a defense line at Mouping County in Shandong. But the defense line did not hold when the Japanese army attacked in early 1938 and forced the Chinese troops to retreat. The intense fighting cut off all traffic and regular postal service. Niu Guangrong was no longer able to wire money back to his wife.[12]

The amount of the last payment that Niu Hu Shi received from her husband was five *yuan*. With it she could purchase more than thirty-four *jin* of machine-ground wheat flour or forty-two *jin* of second-grade flour, which was 63 to 78 percent of one adult's average monthly consumption of food.[13] Moreover, food consumed by working families in Beijing, as found by Sidney Gamble, usually comprised wheat flour and a number of other "cheaper" grains, such as corn millet (*yumi mian* 玉米面), "non-saccharine sorghum" (*gaoliang* 高粱), and another grain described as a "mixture of non-glutinous panicled millet flour and yellow bean flour" (*xiaomi mian* 小米面).[14] Niu Hu Shi could use the five *yuan* to buy an even bigger amount of those cheaper grains for daily meals. In either case, the money from Niu Guangrong was a significant amount, essential for Niu Hu Shi's life.

When her husband's support ceased coming in, things began to fall apart for Niu Hu Shi. She first went to her father-in-law, Niu Quan, for help; but the old man was having trouble even taking care of himself. She then went back to her own father and asked him if he would allow

12. BPDFFY, J65-13-1907, Niu Hu Shi, 1946.
13. For the price of wheat flour in 1938 in Beijing, see BPSSHJ, J2-7-696, "Linian mianfen jiagebiao" [The year-by-year price chart of wheat flour], 1937–1945. One pre-war social survey in Beijing discovered that one adult consumed on average fifty-four *jin* of food every month. L. K. Tao, *Livelihood in Peking*, p. 78.
14. Gamble, *How Chinese Families Live in Peiping*, pp. 82–83.

her to remarry. He was opposed to the idea. While looking for help, Niu Hu Shi's standard of living deteriorated rapidly and she "suffered a terrible hardship of hunger and cold on a daily basis" (*rishou jihan* 日受饥寒).[15] Finally, without any hope of Niu Guangrong's return in sight and unable to put up with these ordeals, Niu Hu Shi packed up her belongings and left home. She first found a woman to adopt her son and then married a man named Li Guolu. Both her remarriage and the adoption were carried out secretly, without Niu Hu Shi's notifying either her in-laws or her parents. She even hid her name and current marriage in order to re-marry.

If the disruptions in the first two years of war had already created some tangible difficulties, local residents like Niu Hu Shi would soon learn that these were just the beginning. More disruptions and disasters would visit the city in the years to come. In December 1939, the Beijing Municipal Government began to tighten the food supply system to cope with the looming problem of food shortages. Rationing was put in place. Members of the Association of New People (Xinminhui 新民會, hereafter ANP), a Japanese-sponsored civil organization, were charged with collecting demographic information such as the number of households in assigned areas and the age distribution of each household. Based on this population census, the government officials then determined a food quota for each district, and the ANP cell organizations stationed in every neighborhood distributed ration booklets to local residents. People were asked to put down clearly on the enclosed document their street number, the name of their alleyway, and the district number, and to stamp it with their personal seal.[16] After the document was verified by ANP officials, residents would then bring the booklet along with their *hukou* card to the food store to purchase their rations. Store clerks were in charge of verifying their documents before making the sale, as they were required to submit their records to a newly established office—the Food Ration Bureau (Shiliang peijisuo 食糧配給所)—for auditing.[17]

15. BPDFFY, J65-13-1907, Niu Hu Shi, 1946.
16. BPSSHJ, J2-7-471, "Di'erci peiji zhuyao shiliangpin shishi yaoling" [The outline of the second food rations distribution in 1943], 1943.
17. BPSJCJWC, J184-2-812, "Peijisuo peiji shimin dami mianfen linshi banfa" [The provisional regulation of distribution of rice and wheat flour, Food Ration Bureau], 1942.

Table 2.1
Wholesale Prices of Chief Food Items in Beijing (in *yuan* per *jin*), June 1940

First-grade wheat flour	¥00.39
Second-grade wheat flour	00.32
Millet	00.26
Corn flour	00.22
Sorghum	00.20

Source: JTYHBJFH, J32-1-133, "Beijingshi pifa wujiabiao" [Wholesale prices in Beijing], June 1940.

Apparently, the new measure proved to be ineffective. Food prices doubled from 1939 to 1940, and this forced the Municipal Government to implement a rationing system that appeared to be far more aggressive and stringent. By mid-1940, five *yuan* in cash purchased barely thirteen *jin* of first-grade wheat flour and twenty *jin* of grain on the wholesale market, about 70 percent less than the 1938 level (see table 2.1). In the meantime, the supply of other daily necessities saw frequent disruptions. In mid-March, the price of fuel rose suddenly. The supply of pork was temporarily cut off in August, causing most of the city's pork shops to close their doors for days, if not weeks.[18] After the Pacific War broke out at the end of 1941, the supply of rice and wheat flour in Beijing was constantly interrupted due to the new Japanese food policy that prioritized military needs over supplying ordinary people's daily consumption.

The year 1943 began with a new round of price increases. According to official statistics, by March food prices in general had increased more than thirty-four times what they were in 1936 (see table 2.2). In anticipation of the growing food shortage, the Municipal Government further reduced the food supply. Under the new policy, people between the ages of eight and sixty could claim one ration unit, while others received only half a food ration.[19] Furthermore, inferior products were mixed in the rations, which caused the quality of food rations to deteriorate dramatically. In a report filed by the committee that supervised the ration distribution on the occasion of the Spring Festival in 1943, officials wrote, "The corn flour distributed this time is relatively poor in

18. Beijingshi shehui kexue yuan lishi yanjiusuo, *Beijing lishi jinian*, pp. 341–42.
19. BPSSHJ, J2-7-471, "Di'erci peiji zhuyao shiliangpin shishi yaoling."

Table 2.2
Wholesale Price Index in Beijing, January–March 1943
(Base period: 1936 = 100)

	January	February	March
Rice, flour, grains	2,195.11	2,839.26	3,456.49
Other food items	1,092.98	1,195.79	1,311.60
Clothing	888.52	978.17	1,125.47
Metals	2,071.04	2,354.09	2,662.76
Fuel	839.34	868.11	948.50
Construction materials	681.28	793.30	830.14
Miscellaneous	590.50	608.04	616.81

Source: BPSJ, J211-1-4, "Beijing pifa wujia zhishu diaochabiao" [Wholesale price index in Beijing], 1943.

quality, some of it is already decayed and contains other substances."[20] As supplies continued to dwindle, on July 24, 1943, the Municipal Government introduced to the public "mixed flour," which instantly became the symbol of war misery.

The great Chinese urban writer of the twentieth century and a Beijing native, Lao She (1899–1966), offered a vivid description of the wartime subsistence crisis in his masterpiece *Sishi tongtang* 四世同堂 (Four generations under one roof). Set in Japanese-occupied Beijing, characters in this novel were exactly contemporary with women and men whom we encounter in legal documents. With regard to the infamous food substitute, Lao She wrote:

> In the basin is something like tea dust of various colors; it also looks like wet powdered medicine. The substance is not rice husk because it is coarser than husk; neither is it kernel because it was finer than kernel. It is definitely not flour because it is not in a smooth blend, but appears like loose sand that does not mix well. The old man grabbed a handful of it and examined it in the palm of his hand. Parts of it are like cornhusk. They are in small chunks and could not be ground into powder. Other bits are dark green nuggets. The old man pondered for a while and surmised

20. BPSSHJ, J2-7-471, "Chunjie peiji zhi qingbao" [Report of the ration distribution on the occasion of the Spring Festival], 1943.

> that it must be bean cake remnants that are used as fertilizers. He determined that the black bits are sorghum husks, as for the other bits . . . He refuses to look at them anymore. Enough! Knowing that there are bean cake remnants is enough; humans [are given feed] and thus treated as pigs. He smells it. This black-green substance does not have the fragrance of grain husks. It is sour and moldy, damp and smelly, as if it has come from a mice hole. The old man's hands tremble. He puts the "flour" in his hands back into the basin, gets up, and walks into his chamber without a word.[21]

Radical measures did not ameliorate the crisis, and economic hardship continued to push many women over the edge. One of them was twenty-three-year-old Yang Bai Shi, who lived in Yongqing County in Hebei Province. Her husband, forty-three-year-old Hao Qilin, went out to work in early 1943 and left her at home to support herself and to raise their son, who was barely three years old. As time passed by, she found herself in trouble. In the hope of regaining a source of livelihood for herself and her son, she made a number of fateful decisions. First, she decided to leave her home and headed for Beijing to find a job. Second, when she ran out of money before reaching Beijing, she sold her son to another family, which could have been a difficult decision but probably the only way to keep herself going while also saving her son from starvation. Third, upon her arrival in Beijing, she married a man nearly twenty years her senior who owned a shop selling sesame cakes. Then less than two months into her new marriage, Yang Bai Shi's lawful husband managed to find her and filed a lawsuit at Beijing District Court accusing her of bigamy. In her own defense during the first hearing, Yang Bai Shi said she remarried only after she had exhausted all of her food as well as other resources from her first marriage.[22]

Some women chose to abscond when they ran out of food. As for government officials, when they ran out of solutions to stabilize the economy they started propaganda campaigns to create at least an illusory sense of contentment. The Chinese Spring Festival of 1944 came early in the year, on January 26. In preparation for the celebration, the North China Political Council ordered officials at the Bureau of Intelligence to compile a book showing cheerful urban scenes during

21. Lao She, *Sishi tongtang*, pp. 1027–28.
22. BPDFFY, J65-8-5602, Yang Bai Shi, 1946.

this happy time of the year. The book, entitled *The Sights of Beijing Lunar New Year*, came out in print on January 31. It depicts a host of venues such as streets, parks, movie theaters, restaurants, and temple fairs, where the festival atmosphere is discernible. The book begins with a description of the temple fairs where local residents gathered to enjoy low-cost amusements and to shop for all kinds of food and toys:

> In the Spring Festival this year, the sky is filled with pretty kites, and the sounds of the spinning pinwheels are loud and clear. The streets adorned with festive couplets radiate with joy. The city and the temple fairs held at Changdian outside of the Heping Gate bustle. Pinwheels, diabolos, an assortment of kites, and large strings of sugarcoated haws once again become children's favorite treats. There are market stalls serving soy drinks, sweet pea purée, glutinous rice cake, candied fruits, and foods purely characteristic of the northern Chinese cuisine.[23]

The book project was part of a new round of propaganda campaigns designed to increase local support for the Japanese and to encourage people to contribute to war efforts by means of donating money and materials and laboring for government projects. Choosing to advertise the image of peace and prosperity under Japanese occupation, the book attempts to prove that the merits of the Japanese rule in Beijing did not stem from any radical changes the regime had envisioned or implemented but lay in the regime's ability to ensure that people lived normal lives. In other words, people could continue to celebrate as usual the important festivals such as the Lunar New Year and enjoy the abundant supply of seasonal products and holiday goodies, and not be worried about the ongoing war and occupation. The propaganda strategy's use of a "normal life" theme ironically reveals the regime's struggle to cope with the tougher and grimmer realities of prolonged war and a depressed economy. The regime hoped that for local residents facing the hardships of war, inflation, shortage, and austerity that destroyed livelihoods, this sense of "normal life" would surely hold greater appeal and win the regime some support. Yet, as the propaganda campaign geared up, and as more news about Japanese defeats in the Pacific reached the

23. Huabei zhengwu weiyuanhui zongwuting qingbaoju, *Xinchun Beijing fengjingxian*, p. 3.

Table 2.3
Price Index and Increase of Note Issues in Beijing, 1939–45
(Base period: 1939 = 1.00)

	Indexes	
Year (end)	Wholesale prices	FRB note issue
1939	1.00	1.00
1940	1.41	1.56
1941	2.36	2.11
1942	4.73	3.45
1943	13.60	8.22
1944	142.00	34.60
1945	1,535.00	183.00

Source: Arthur Young, *China's Wartime Finance and Inflation, 1937–1945*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965, p. 303.

Table 2.4
Prices of Food and Other Necessities in Beijing (in *yuan* per *jin*),
November–December, 1944

	November 30	December 15	December 29
Rice	¥16.00	22.00	40.00
Millet	6.00	10.00	24.00
Corn flour	5.00	9.80	18.00
Sorghum	4.00	9.00	16.00
Soy sauce	7.20	10.00	14.00

Source: BPHG, J68-1-1213, "Beijing shiliang ji bixupin jiage bijiaobiao" [Prices of Food and Other Necessities in Beijing], 1944.

occupied city of Beijing, inflation gained momentum. Official reports indicate a ten-fold jump in wholesale prices from 1943 to 1944, and the issuance of bank notes also increased (see table 2.3). Simultaneous with the looming inflation was another round of food shortfalls in late 1944. Rice and wheat flour nearly disappeared from the market, and millet and corn became more and more precious. In the month of December alone, food prices shot up abruptly more than three times (see table 2.4).

In early 1945, the Japanese occupation began to crumble, but before it collapsed, people would endure still more suffering. With the drastic devaluation of bank notes in March, the puppet government declared a

new policy that starting April 1, all taxes must be paid in kind. In the meantime, to counter the decline in the food supply, the official food ration was reduced to ten *jin* of "mixed grain powders" (*zaliang fen* 雜糧粉) per adult per month. The tipping point came in July and August, just before the Japanese were about to surrender. The number of bank notes issued by the government increased, and food prices went up sharply (see table 2.5). On August 15, the Japanese imperial army surrendered; China had won the bitter eight-year war of resistance. In October, when the Nationalist troops entered Beijing to disarm the Japanese military and regain authority, they found a war-torn city. Relief would not come immediately, however; the rampant inflation halted only temporarily and then ran out of control.[24]

By this time, charges of lack of support brought by wives against their husbands had become almost cliché in legal proceedings in criminal investigations and court hearings. More importantly, these testimonies of individual suffering were readily accepted by judicial officials and were taken down in the official documents. Such a consensus on the subsistence crisis indicated that the drastic economic deterioration in wartime Beijing was a widely recognizable fact. It was not just Guo Yang Shi, Niu Hu Shi, or Yang Bai Shi—whose cases made their way to the Beijing District Court—who suffered tremendously from the wartime economic collapse; even those of higher socioeconomic status, such as judicial officials and their families, also fell victim to the crisis. As city residents who also had wives to support and children to rear, these officials, too, had firsthand knowledge of economic troubles.

Take Judge Wang Xinxiu, who was given charge of Niu Hu Shi's trial, as an example. In 1946 he was thirty-three years old, his wife was four years his junior, and they had two sons and one daughter.[25]

24. Shun-Hsin Chou demonstrates that the stabilization of the bank note and the subsequent price drop in late 1945 were primarily caused by "the undue optimism then prevailing throughout the country" and "the temporary shortage of (new) notes in the formerly occupied areas." Based on such an unrealistic evaluation of the market, the Nationalist government introduced a fixed redemption rate of 200:1 to redeem the puppet regime's bank note. Therefore, "the overvaluation of the *fabi* currency resulted in a great increase in the purchasing power of the currency," and the price dropped down. Chou, *The Chinese Inflation,* p. 24.
25. BPDFFY, J65-3-339, "Beiping difang fayuan sifaguan lüli" [Curriculum Vitae of judicial officials at Beijing District Court], 1943.

Table 2.5
Value of Note Issues by Government Banks, 1937–45
(in millions of CNY)

Period ending	Value
1937, July	¥1,445
1938	2,305
1939	4,287
1940	7,867
1941	15,133
1942	34,346
1943	75,379
1944	189,461
1945, August	556,907
1945, December	1,031,932

Source: Arthur Young, *China's Wartime Finance and Inflation, 1937–1945*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965, p. 304.

Although we do not know much about Judge Wang's family budget, we are able to use the sociological method of cost consumption units—"measure(ing) the requirements of members of a family in terms of those of an adult male"—to reconstruct his family's typical expenses. Judge Wang's five-member family amounted to 2.7 to 2.9 consumption units.[26] Sociologists have posited that an adult male required 1.3 *jin* of food grain every day, which meant that Judge Wang's family consumed at least 3.51 to 3.77 *jin* per day, or roughly 110 *jin* per month, of food. Usually for a family of modest means, millet and corn flour accounted respectively for 40 percent of the family's total grain consumption, and rice or wheat flour made up the remaining 20 percent. This amount of grain cost at least 205.92 *yuan* every month in early 1943.[27] The actual living expenses of Judge Wang's family were surely higher than this,

26. Sidney Gamble counted the first adult male in the household, nineteen and over, as one consumption unit; the first adult female, nineteen and over, as 0.9 unit; the first child as 0.3–0.6 unit depending on his or her age; and each additional child as 0.2–0.5 unit. Gamble, *How Chinese Families Live in Peiping*, p. 13.
27. Li Jinghan, "Beiping zuidi xiandu de shenghuo chengdu de taolun," p. 6.

because the cost was reckoned by the wholesale price and he would have paid higher prices to retailers. He also had other food expenses to cover, such as meat, vegetables, condiments, and so forth. Judge Wang's monthly salary was two hundred *yuan*. At the end of the year, Beijing District Court also allocated an additional seventy *yuan* to all of its judges to help them meet increasing living costs.[28] On this salary alone, Judge Wang would not have been able to support his family, and his wife would have been forced to find a paying job outside the home; otherwise, they would live in hunger.

The average family size of judges working in wartime Beijing District Court was 6.6 persons.[29] This means that some judges' financial burdens were heavier than that of Judge Wang, and their families' livelihoods, though better than many runaway wives standing trial before them, were far from secure. For example, Zhao Yuzhang, the chief justice of the civil court, started his legal career in Tianjin District Court in 1934, at the age of twenty-six. On January 11, 1943, he was appointed chief justice in the Beijing District Court. Judge Zhao had a large family, which included his sixty-seven-year-old father, sixty-two-year-old mother, thirty-six-year-old wife, and five children. Because he was a senior judge, his salary, higher than Judge Wang's, was 350 *yuan* per month. Judge Zhao's income was perhaps enough to cover his family's expenses in 1943, but one year later, in December 1944, he would have found that he had to earn at least 13,308 *yuan* per month in order to maintain the same standard of living.[30]

Since the Japanese army's invasion of north China, residents in Beijing had rarely seen bloody battles, but the war and occupation greatly affected their material lives. Wartime shortages and inflation paralyzed the local economy and severely weakened the economic foundations of many families that had already been struggling for decades before the war. Women were especially vulnerable. Lacking an independent and reliable source of income, they had to count on more than work for their well-being. Such additional support could come from

28. BPDFFY, J65-3-177, "Beiping difang fayuan jianchachu zhiyuan gongzibiao [Salary of the judicial officials at the Beijing District Court], 1942.
29. BPDFFY, J65-3-339, "Beiping difang fayuan sifaguan lüli," 1943; BPDFFY, J65-3-161, "Beiping difang fayuan sifaguan lüli," 1942.
30. BPHG, J68-1-1213, "Beijing xiaji Zhongguoji guanyuan shengjifei diaochabiao" [The living cost of Chinese officials' families], December 1944.

a charity, a government social welfare program, or most likely one's family—in particular, one's husband. But criminal case files demonstrate that men were not always a reliable source of support in early twentieth-century Beijing, as their financial solvency and prospects were threatened by economic downturn. Some hung on; others might just give up their spousal responsibility and leave their wives behind. In either case, women could find themselves under constant duress, struggling to survive, and in danger of succumbing to poverty. Without immediate relief in sight, some women saw desertion as a crucial step in their search for a secure livelihood. To run away and remarry was a strategy of survival. And those who ran away presented a new test for judicial officials and the city's civil and criminal laws.

Punishing Runaway Wives

Wifely desertion had been a socially entrenched practice among people from the lower echelons of society in many periods of Chinese history. Historians have shown that lawsuits involving runaway wives constituted a significant portion of late imperial officials' regular judicial docket.[31] Under Qing law, wifely desertion was a crime, because "it challenged the family, the institution on which the state based its power."[32] Lawmakers in twentieth-century China joined forces with social reformers to attack the imperial notion of the patriarchal and hierarchical family structure. By interpreting it in the liberal legislative framework, lawmakers and judges no longer viewed wifely desertion as a crime but a forfeiture of the civil contract of marriage by the female party. To de-criminalize runaway wives was one crucial element of the early twentieth-century legislative reform that attempted to unlock women from male domination and patriarchal authority. But when running away from home, the woman left behind a crumbling family. Lawmakers and judges faced a new challenge of how to address women's financial concerns while protecting the institution of the family. The

31. Paderni, "I Thought I Would Have Some Happy Days"; Wang Yuesheng, *Qingdai zhongqi hunyin chongtu touxi*.
32. Paderni, "I Thought I Would Have Some Happy Days," p. 2.

following case reveals the court's approach to prosecuting cases involving runaway wives under reformed criminal laws.

On March 5, 1945, Li Fenglai, a forty-year-old peasant, stood in the Qianmen East Station lobby looking around for his boarding gate. Following him was a woman who carried a small piece of luggage under her arm and who appeared nervous. She was twenty-four-year-old Sun Li Shi, wife of shop assistant Sun Shichun, but at the moment she was about to leave Beijing with Li Fenglai. They passed the security checkpoint and boarded the train. As soon as they found themselves a place in the compartment, the train started moving and gradually the city's skyline became unintelligible. After traveling for two days by train and long-distance bus, they arrived at Li Fenglai's hometown, in Zaoqiang County in south Hebei Province. Back in Beijing, Sun Li Shi's husband, Sun Shichun, came home from work in the evening to find the room empty. He did not worry because Sun Li Shi had told him that morning that she would spend the day with her natal family. He might have even comforted himself by thinking that it was all right for his wife to stay with her mother overnight and that perhaps it was better for her, a young woman, not to walk home alone after dark. The next day, however, Sun Shichun started to feel anxious and angry. At noon, he decided to go pick up his wife. When he went to her family's home, he was told by Sun Li Shi's brother that she had not visited the day before. Sun Shichun then rushed to his own parents' home to check on his wife's whereabouts. After finding that she was not there either, he notified the police.[33]

During the police's preliminary investigation, Sun Shichun's mother told police officers two things. First, she had never been able to get along with her daughter-in-law since her son's marriage, but she managed to live with the couple under one roof for about three years. The fragile relationship broke on March 3, 1945, when she drove the young couple out after a bitter disagreement. Sun Shichun immediately found a place in another part of the city for them to settle. Second, her mother-in-law noticed that Sun Li Shi had recently been in unusually close contact with one of the family neighbors, sixty-six-year-old Liang Zhao Shi. The tip led the police to interrogate the elder neighbor, and the investigation that followed unraveled Sun Li Shi's domestic problem and her desertion plot.

33. BPDFFY, J65-10-554, Liang Zhao Shi, 1945.

For Sun Li Shi, the problem was twofold. Her tense relationship with her husband's family, especially her mother-in-law, presented an important and constant source of unhappiness. On the other hand, there was also an underlining problem, a financial one, that put a strain on her marriage. Her husband, Sun Shichun, worked in a neighborhood shop making and selling various ready-to-eat staples, including steamed bread (*mantou* 饅頭), cornmeal cake (*wotou* 窩頭), batter fried in deep oil (*youtiao* 油條), steamed twisted rolls (*huajuan* 花卷), and thick round unsweetened cakes made from wheat flour and fried on a hot griddle (*laobing* 烙餅). A shop assistant had quite a few responsibilities, such as buying materials (flour, cooking oil, sesame, and fuel), preparing dough by mixing fermented flour with sesame sauce, toasting and frying, serving customers, and keeping the shop clean. The shop was normally open for long hours, from early morning to late evening; but it was only busy around meal times and slowed down during the rest of the day. Working there was not necessarily intense, but onerous and tedious, and the pay was low. As sociological research and municipal social surveys found, shop assistants joined with rickshaw pullers, street peddlers, collies, servants, unskilled workers, beggars, and the homeless to fill the ranks of the urban poor.[34]

Such a stringent family budget situation might have forced Sun Li Shi to share residence with her parents-in-law, with whom she found it difficult to get along. Soon after she and her husband were forced to move out, she began worrying about how long her husband's meager income could support the expensive freedom of living independently and free from his parents' watchful eyes. Under these circumstances, Sun Li Shi made up her mind to get away from her deprived life and depressing marriage. She went to Liang Zhao Shi for help. The elder neighbor comforted her and told her of the possibility of finding work at a Japanese-run garment mill. But Sun Li Shi replied that she would rather find a new husband, a financially solvent one, to solve her problem once and for all. Liang Zhao Shi hesitated for a while but then agreed to help. She went to two other women, forty-eight-year-old Zhao An Shi and sixty-two-year-old Yang Zhang Shi. They lived in another courtyard compound right around the corner from where Liang Zhao

34. Li Jinghan. "Beiping zuidi xiandu de shenghuo chengdu de taolun," p. 6; Xu, "Wicked Citizens," pp. 85–87.

Shi lived. One of them happened to know sixty-four-year-old Li Jinhe, who owned a noodle shop (*qiemian pu* 切麵鋪) less than a kilometer down the street. Jinhe once said that he had a nephew, Li Fenglai, living in the countryside and looking for a wife.

Following the tip, the three women brought Sun Li Shi's story to Li Jinhe, who agreed to the marriage on his nephew's behalf. Then the three neighbors worked out a plan to help Sun Li Shi run away from home. On the morning of March 5, Sun Li Shi left home. As previously arranged, she first met Liang Zhao Shi and Zhao An Shi, and then the two escorted her to Yang Zhang Shi's home. She spent the entire afternoon there, and Li Fenglai picked her up at dusk. Together they rushed to the railway station and left Beijing. Unfortunately, her plan did not work out well. Sun Li Shi was arrested on the second day after she arrived in her new husband's hometown and taken back to Beijing immediately. On March 15, 1945, Sun Shichun filed a lawsuit against Sun Li Shi at the Beijing District Court.

Had Sun Li Shi lived in late imperial times, the punishment for deserting her family would have been harsh. The *Great Qing Code* stipulated that "if [the husband does not wish the divorce] and the wife [on her own] turns her back on her husband and runs away, she will be punished with one hundred strokes of the heavy bamboo, and the husband may, as he will, marry her off or sell her."[35] The imperial code also granted judicial officials the authority to vary the degree of penalty in accordance with the circumstances under which the individual wife ran away, as well as her conduct after she fled. Women who remarried on their own after fleeing were subjected to strangulation. If her husband abandoned her in the first place, the runaway wife could receive a lighter sentence—eighty strokes of the heavy bamboo. Further leniency would be given to concubines. Since a concubine was inferior to a wife in the imperial institution of marriage and family, the punishment for a runaway concubine would be reduced by two degrees. Runaway women were subject to criminal punishment as soon as they stepped out of the home. As to the motive for desertion or choices women made after running off, it could only affect the degree of punishment.

When Sun Li Shi stood trial in 1945, wifely desertion was no longer an act liable for criminal punishment. In other words, the crimi-

35. Jones, *The Great Qing Code*, p. 134.

nal court did not prosecute her for running away from her husband; instead, it investigated to decide if it had enough evidence to charge her with committing adultery or bigamy. The focus of investigation was on her conduct prior to the desertion and her choices thereafter. The prosecutor first suspected that a pre-existing sexual liaison between Sun Li Shi and her new partner Li Fenglai might have led to the desertion. After questioning Sun Li Shi's family background and her motive for running away from home, the investigation then put her relationship with Li Fenglai under close scrutiny:

> *Q:* Did you live with Li Fenglai when you were on your way to his hometown?
> *A:* We were on the train together, but I never slept with him, nor did I [sleep with him] at his home.
> *Q:* But the indictment claimed you two slept together.
> *A:* No. Never!
> *Q:* Did you have sex with Li Fenglai?
> *A:* Never!

The same set of questions was asked of Li Fenglai and Liang Zhao Shi when they took the stand. Li Fenglai testified that he had not previously been acquainted with Sun Li Shi or any member of her family; he was told that she was a widow planning to remarry. Although they spent two days together after leaving Beijing and before being arrested, they had always been surrounded by passengers, family relatives, and neighbors; and thus they did not share any intimate moments. Convinced by this testimony, the judge dropped the adultery charge.

The court investigation proceeded; and the investigative focus was directed to determine whether Sun Li Shi had committed bigamy. Many women chose to build a new family after running off, since a formal marital relationship would secure a woman proper social standing as a wife in her new husband's family and neighborhood, which presumably offered women more protection than if she were not married. However, the law required one to file a legal divorce before getting remarried. By consummating a new marriage without dissolving the previous one, women entered into bigamous relationships and broke the law that defined marriage as a monogamous institution. In Sun Li Shi's case, however, the investigation did not produce enough evidence to convict her of bigamy.

Q: Did you marry Li Fenglai [on the day you met him]?
A: I came to his place on that day. Then we boarded the train and left for his hometown at Zaoqiang.
Q: So you two were married when you arrived at Zaoqiang?
A: The next day, when we arrived, we were told that the police had uncovered my trail.
Q: Did you hold a wedding at Zaoqiang?
A: No.
Q: Did you two live together?
A: No.
Q: Why didn't you two sleep together?
A: The custom in the countryside does not permit a couple to sleep together unless they have held a wedding ceremony.

Sun Li Shi's trial ended on April 28, 1945. Both Sun Li Shi and Li Fenglai were acquitted of charges of adultery and bigamy. The matchmaker, Liang Zhao Shi, was free from the charge of abduction, as the court confirmed that her alleged victim ran off by herself. As to the other co-defendants, two neighbors and Li Fenglai's uncle, the plaintiff Sun Shichun had withdrawn his complaint against them earlier. The decision to release Sun Li Shi was likely to have stunned Sun Shichun, as it shattered his plan to punish his "unruly" wife. But the prosecutorial process and the legal framework reveal the ways new laws were designed to free women from male authority while protecting family integrity.

By contrast, in imperial times, the criminalization of wifely desertion and the draconian manner in which it was punished showed the seriousness of this conduct in the eyes of imperial officials. Marriage was celebrated as a mutual alliance between two families that advanced group wealth and prestige. Once married, a woman separated from her natal family and lived with her husband's household, becoming a member of it. The ideal image of wifehood required women to raise children, serve parents-in-law, and remain chaste, all contributing to the family integrity and domestic order where social and political order started. The imperial law therefore protected the family by promoting model behaviors and punishing those who threatened the domestic order. In statutes, Qing officials created a new legal term of "rootless rascal," or "bare stick," to stereotype the outside male in domestic crimes. Matthew Sommer argues that in the eyes of the imperial

government, the major threat to family order came from people who did not have a proper profession, property, and a permanent residence; such a man was virtually "an outsider altogether, who was feared as a fundamental threat to the family-based social order because he had no place in it at all."[36]

The official stereotype of troublemakers reveals the Qing state's dependence on, as well as confidence in, the existing patriarchal and hierarchical family structure. It envisioned and strived to encapsulate all members of society into the family matrix, and to determine for everyone a place where his or her social behavior could be regulated by the established rules and norms. The campaign also sought to strengthen the family from within through women's active participation. Therefore, a runaway wife, whether or not she had extramarital relations before desertion or initiated a new marriage thereafter, was subjected to punishment. The act of desertion itself challenged patrilineal authority, deviated from the prescribed male-dominated gender system, and undermined both family and social order.

The new twentieth-century laws claimed to reconfigure women's status in the pattern of household authority and gender roles. First and foremost, lawmakers declared that women would be treated as independent individuals capable of autonomous action.[37] They expected a woman to enter a marital relationship as her husband's equal partner. She was encouraged to establish a marriage that could cultivate new cultural ideals such as freedom of choice, social autonomy, economic independence, gender equality, and a fulfilling life. She was also promised the freedom to either stay in the relationship or break away from it; and the law could help to liberate her from an oppressive relationship. Moreover, laws treated marriage as a state-sanctioned civil contract between one man and one woman, and domestic disputes were to be dealt with in the civil court. Wifely desertion was an act marking a marital crisis. When it occurred, the court could either seek to repair the damaged marriage by returning a runaway wife to her husband; or it could grant a legal divorce if the relationship in question was beyond repair. If a runaway wife stood on trial in the criminal court, what came

36. Sommer, *Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China*, p. 112.
37. Philip Huang, *Code, Custom, and Legal Practice*, p. 166; Zhao Ma, "Wayward Daughters," pp. 187–89.

under intense adjudicative scrutiny was not the act of desertion itself but the woman's prior conduct and her choices thereafter. The twentieth-century legislative configuration of marriage on the one hand advocated a woman's right to be an independent individual and to make her own decisions; on the other hand, it held a woman accountable for her own criminal offenses, usually adultery or bigamy—the former being a betrayal of one's husband and the latter being a violation of the monogamous institution of marriage.

Lawmakers in the twentieth century completely eliminated the term "bare stick" from both the legal codes and court documents. One obvious reason for this was that in criminal cases many "outside males" were not penniless and "rootless" at all. Most of them held a viable source of income and maintained a better livelihood than the family from which the woman was attempting to escape; this, of course, was the principal reason prompting women to run away with them. The elimination of the imperial criminal category in new legislation and in the adjudication process for criminal cases, as well as the new profile of the financially solvent outside male in 1940s criminal case files, showcases that the family in wartime Beijing was disintegrating from within. Several factors other than "outside males"—such as massive poverty, depression, and runaway inflation—had a much greater role in this disintegration. It became increasingly difficult for the family to function as a haven that secured a woman's livelihood; as a result, women ran off in quest of subsistence. In Sun Li Shi's case, she defended her actions by blaming her husband for not providing enough economic support:

Q: Did Sun Shichun work? How could he earn money but refuse to support you?
A: He earned money but did not bring food to me, and [as a result] I was left starving every two or three days (*santian liangtou* 三天兩頭); no food from him!
Q: What did you say to Liang Zhao Shi?
A: I said to Old Mother Liang that you've got to save my humble life. My husband beats me all the time. If you don't help me, I would either be beaten to death or die of starvation. You must help me and get me out of [this miserable life].
Q: You said that [your husband] found a room at Shifuma Avenue after moving out of [your parents-in-law's] place. Did you move [to the new place]?

A: Being hungry all the time, I asked him to find me a way out [of this dire situation]. [I told him] if he did not support me, I would have to find a way by myself. He said it was up to me. I would not have run off if he had fed me even with soybean dregs (*doufu zha* 豆腐渣).

Sun Li Shi's matchmaker, her neighbor Liang Zhao Shi, gave similar testimony. She said:

Q: Did you know that Sun Li Shi was a married woman?
A: I know. But her husband was always beating and berating her. Her husband sometimes brought home eight or ten *jin* of corn flour, but no one knew when he will get more. Before many days had passed, he would be at it again. If he wasn't beating her, he was telling her off. She told me, "If I don't throw myself in the river, I will find a deep well [to drown myself]." To this I replied, "You are so young, why would you want to put your life in danger?"

In view of the massive poverty among low-income people in Beijing even before the wartime decade, and in response to the large volume of litigation relating to husbands who failed to support their wives, the law set a series of restrictions to rule out the legality of the charge of "non-support" if it was caused solely by poverty.[38] A verdict in 1914 read: "To go out to make a living on account of poverty will not be considered abandonment." Another verdict from the same year read: "Failure to provide clothes and jewelry due to poverty does not justify divorce."[39] Then the civil code enacted in 1930 and 1931 went further, declaring that a person who himself or herself had no means of survival was exempted from the duty to support his or her family member(s).[40] Given that the social reality was that the husband was almost always the supporter, this provision was designed mainly to relieve the husband's obligation of family support in the event that he was unable to do so. Several case examples also articulated the court's position on this issue. A verdict in 1928 read: "Under circumstances where both husband and wife are in need of support, but neither is able to support the other, the failure of support will not be judged as evidence of the charge of desertion by either party."[41]

38. Fu and Zhou, *Zhonghuaminguo liufa liyou panjie huibian*, p. 1051.
39. Ibid., p. 1050.
40. *Liufa quanshu*, art. 1118 in *Zhonghua minguo minfa*, p. 97.
41. Fu and Zhou, *Zhonghuaminguo liufa liyou panjie huibian*, p. 1135.

Moreover, the civil code put a limit on who was eligible to receive support. First, only direct blood relatives (parents and children) qualified as dependents, and the inalienable right of unconditional support applied to them alone—not to the wife. Second, it identified "the person who is entitled to receive support as the one who is unable to maintain a subsistent living and does not have survival capacity."[42] The wife's right to receive support from her husband was conditional; a man or woman supported and received support from his or her spouse. A verdict in 1940 read: "The civil law stipulates that the family head and family members are mutually obliged to support each other. . . . In cases when the husband is able to provide monetary allowance, and the wife is also able to maintain her living, the husband is not obligated by law to support her."[43] Woman should be first and foremost self-accountable, socially and economically, and the state's duty was to cultivate women's sense of independence and protect them from any trap that might pull them back into dependence and subordination. Mutual support and individual accountability held the key to building domestic strength and saving personal livelihood.

While domestic support became a daunting task in ordinary people's daily lives, it was a complicated legal issue for judicial officials as well, primarily as a result of the early twentieth-century legislative reform that had profoundly reconfigured an array of issues concerning domestic life and intimate relationships. By the early 1940s, more than a decade had passed since the Republican Criminal Law (1935) and Civil Law (1930–31) were promulgated. As many earlier researchers have pointed out, these two pieces of legislation were based on new principles of gender equality and individual freedom.[44] These abstract principles of gender equality engendered a new notion of domestic economic structure under which the woman acted as a contributor to the family's economic well-being. Put differently, marriage, under the new laws, became a union based on shared responsibility in terms of support and domestic economic strength, which in principle relied upon women's economic contributions as well as men's. Both of these laws remained in force in the Japanese-

42. *Liufa quanshu*, art. 1117 in *Zhonghua minguo minfa*, p. 97.
43. Fu and Zhou, *Zhonghuaminguo liufa liyou panjie huibian*, p. 1135.
44. Bernhardt, "Women and the Law."

occupied regions during the Sino-Japanese War and thus continued to reshape people's interactions with the legal system.

As mentioned above, both the Republican criminal law and civil law adopted new measures to enforce the new legislative principle of gender equality and to help women assert their social and economic, and even sexual, autonomy.[45] The criminal law no longer prosecuted or punished women for leaving home in search of better livelihood, though it did not openly encourage wifely desertion. It expected women to work with their husbands, so to speak, to overcome hardship together rather than run away from it. In the same vein, the civil law regarded women as an equal partner and shareholder in terms of the legal status and economic responsibility of a marriage. By limiting women's claims of spousal support, the law sought to replace domestic dependency, in particular female dependency upon male support, with individual accountability and economic independence. Here we see how the liberal legislative principle was translated into the new configuration of women's claims of support and, ultimately, of women's role in the domestic economic structure. The following section explores how lower-class women themselves perceived and articulated the family economic structure and the pattern of household authority.

Desperate Wives and Anxious Husbands

The sustained economic crisis in wartime Beijing manipulated the balance between supply and demand, forced local households to creatively cut their spending, and affected domestic relationships. Survival tactics and social dislocations grew a "culture of inflation." Let us go back to the above-mentioned case of Niu Hu Shi's, the GMD soldier's wife who ran away from home and remarried to obtain a better livelihood. Her depositions offer some clues to the cultural reaction to inflation: how did lower-class men and women understand the meaning of the institution of marriage and their respective roles of husband and wife?

After serving in the Nationalist army for more than ten years, Niu Guangrong and his battalion were redeployed to his hometown of

45. Zhao Ma, "Wayward Daughters."

Beijing in April 1946. The troops were carrying out the central government's order to retake the city after Japan's unconditional surrender; Niu Guangrong, meanwhile, was planning to undertake another mission, a personal one, to retrieve his wife, Niu Hu Shi, who had taken their young son and run away from home eight years earlier. He first went to his father-in-law, a peasant named Hu Yuting, to find out his wife's whereabouts. Hu Yuting told him that Niu Hu Shi had remarried with the help of a go-between named Li Su Shi and advised Niu Guangrong to ask her directly. He did so, and through her found his runaway wife and son. Niu Hu Shi had married Li Su Shi's brother-in-law, a man surnamed Li; Niu Guangrong's son had been adopted, also with Li Su Shi's help, by another woman. On April 26, 1946, Niu Guangrong filed a bigamy charge against Niu Hu Shi and also accused the go-between Li Su Shi of seducing and selling his wife.

Since Niu Hu Shi insisted that she ran off solely because of a lack of financial support, court investigations focused upon where her daily support came from and whether the support was enough for her subsistence. Niu Hu Shi's deposition read:

Q: Can Li Guolu [Niu Hu Shi's second husband] support you?
A: Yes, he can.
Q: How could you remarry Li Guolu while you were maintaining a marital relationship with Niu Guangrong?
A: I had been waiting [for Niu Guangrong] for years, during which I did not have "a source of livelihood." Niu Guangrong had suggested getting remarried, and I did so accordingly.
Q: Could your parents support you?
A: They were very poor, so they couldn't.

The judge interrogated Niu Hu Shi's matchmaker, Li Su Shi, with a similar set of questions. Her deposition read:

Q: Did you know Niu Hu Shi was married to Niu Guangrong?
A: Yes, I did.
Q: Given your knowledge of her marital status as Niu Guangrong's wife, why did you introduce her into a new marriage?
A: [Because] Niu Guangrong had left home for three years and stopped supporting Niu Hu Shi. He wrote a letter and permitted her to

remarry. Niu Hu Shi then begged me [to help her]. I initially rejected her [request]. It was my mother-in-law that asked me [to help her].

Q: Could Niu Hu Shi "support herself" (*zimou shenghuo* 自謀生活)?

A: Niu Hu Shi couldn't support herself. She once attempted to work as a servant, but she couldn't find an employer.

These depositions suggest three options available to women in terms of their daily survival. One was "self-support" (*ziyang* 自養). But as previously shown, opportunities for married women, especially those from the lower echelons of society, to find regular paying jobs in early twentieth-century Beijing were limited, if not entirely absent. The depression in the early 1920s and 1930s and the following decade of war and occupation diminished even officials' and reformers' optimistic hopes of achieving the goal of helping women to be economically independent. In light of the dire economic prospects for women, judicial officials in the 1940s hardly ever expected them to be able to support themselves. In the prosecution process, therefore, officials never questioned women's testimonies that their own source of income, through regular paying jobs or other means, was inadequate for them to support themselves.

When a woman could not support herself, another possible source of support came from her parents. However, the cultural mores in this period did not require natal parents to be responsible for supporting their married daughters; local customs only asked parents to step in if the subsistence of their son's family was in danger. Niu Guangrong's petition to the court provides an example:

> [After I wrote to my wife that I would be no longer able to send her money], my father comforted her by saying, "Because my son could not send you money in recent times, we worried that you would starve. Starting from the day of our conversation, you can bring your child to my home for meals; and from now on the family [your parents-in-law] can support your meals. If the family cannot sustain you in the future, you could announce in the neighborhood that "the Niu family refused to support me and I suffered starvation." It would not be too late for you to remarry at that time.

The third and most common source of support came from one's husband. The two letters Niu Guangrong wrote to his wife and to Niu

Hu Shi's father further attest to the conception of the husband as the principle economic provider of the family. The first letter, written to Niu Hu Shi's father, reads thus:

> Your humble son-in-law is so unlucky. I lost my job [which caused] my family to be as poor as if everything has been washed away by a flood (*yipin ruxi* 一貧如洗). I cannot afford even coarse rice and thin gruel for my daily meal. . . . The country has been at war in recent years, and the postal service has stopped running. It will take a couple of months for this letter to reach you. I couldn't send money back even if I had some. [Under these circumstances, hardships] separate an affectionate couple. [Given] she [Niu Hu Shi] has nothing to eat, how can she just sit waiting to die [of starvation]? This must be her reason for running away. . . . I am relieved to learn that my wife and my son have managed to escape from imminent starvation resulting from my inability to support them.

The second was to Niu Hu Shi herself and it read:

> After your husband mailed a letter with five *yuan* enclosed from Mouping County in Shandong Province, it's been several months without hearing from you. Your husband sent you several letters, and no word came back from you yet. I once again don't send you money with this letter, because the postal service no longer carries money orders due to the war between China and Japan. Your precious body relied solely upon your husband's support. Without receiving money for such a long period of time, how could you make a living? Worry about [your hardships] makes your husband hardly able to eat. Every day when I think about all you have suffered as my wife, my grief was beyond what words can describe. Now I learn that there won't be any means to send money to Beijing. My wife will starve to death as a result. [You] are truly pitiful. My wife should write a letter immediately to me and describe to me in detail what you and our child have suffered. If you cannot stand living in poverty with me without food and clothes, you'd better make your own decision [about] marrying someone else to avoid further sufferings. You can also [let someone] adopt our son. These are words out of my heart. . . . [Since I] left you—my wife at home starving without support, you are free to get married [again].

Niu Guangrong's two letters reveal that he shared the same rationale with his wife, holding the conviction that a wife's livelihood

came from her husband, not from any form of outside employment. He expressed his deep sorrow at his failure to support his wife and his blessing for her to go her own way—if that was the only way for her to save herself. Between the lines, there is no indication that he thought about whether Niu Hu Shi should try to find a job or pursue any alternative other than escape. He reasoned, first, that it was his duty to support her, and second, that if he was unable to do so, his wife's livelihood would surely be in danger. And lastly, he lamented that under the threat of starvation and his uncertain return, Niu Hu Shi's attempt to flee was understandable. To be clear, husbands in many cases did not agree to their wives' escape, which explains the large volume of litigation involving runaway wives in Beijing District Court in the 1940s. However, like Niu Guangrong, these men never questioned the basic rationale of their wives' dependency; rather, they sought to prove that they were still able and reliable providers for their wives.

The everyday ideology of marriage set up an equation with women's subordination to male support on the one hand, and women's companionship with their husbands on the other. Such a meaning of marriage in economic terms deviated from the imperial vision that signified marriage as a coalition of two clans through which the couple could perform ancestral worship and continue the family line. It was somewhat more materialistic in that it downplayed the cosmological meanings and ritual significance of marriage. Neither did the popular norm conform to the new reformist model of marriage that highlighted free choice, gender equality, companionship, and the cultivation of citizenship. For many women from lower-echelon families, the process of getting married (or remarried) was meaningful not just because it was a quest for a lifelong companion, but also because it was a pragmatic decision determining her well-being for the rest of her life. Women were aware of the social endorsement of that perception, and that is exactly why family members, matchmakers, and potential new husbands were so easily convinced of the need to deliver a new marital situation for married women living in poverty.

If we take the hierarchical ideology and patriarchal norms of marriage at face value, we can see them as reaffirming the rigid categories of male domination versus female victimization, or patriarchal

oppression versus women's subjugation.[46] However, a close look at the actual operation of the popular perception of marriage in wartime Beijing shows that those presumably powerful husbands were also very likely to find themselves victims of the same patriarchal norms. Women did not hesitate to use those norms to their advantage. What catalyzed the turning of the tables was the economic difficulty that siphoned off the breadwinners' capacity to provide a secure income to their wives, thereby weakening their authority over family matters.

Wifely desertion in wartime Beijing was by no means a revolutionary act; rather, it was a means for a woman to pursue her own best interests inside the existing institution of family in accordance with its normative elements. Runaway wives calculated their options in a way similar to that found by E. P. Thompson among eighteenth-century food rioters in England or the rural rebels in Southeast Asia studied by James Scott. Rioters and rebels in those two respective cases joined protest and rebellion primarily to protect their subsistence livelihood and not to attempt to topple the existing unequal economic structure.[47] Runaway wives were hoping to find a solvent husband; and it never occurred to them to resist the domestic hierarchy itself.

The existence of wifely desertion thus reveals the common belief among both men and women in the reciprocal and hierarchical structure of marriage. The popular norm rendered everyone a legitimate place in the domestic hierarchy, whereby a husband held guaranteed authority to rule and a wife enjoyed a guaranteed right of subsistence. Under this moral rubric, a wife only ran off when her husband failed to perform his duties to maintain the family welfare, resulting in intolerable misery. Many runaway wives considered their choice of desertion morally just and legitimate; they contended it was their husbands who should be held accountable for putting their wives' subsistence in danger. In this situation, the wartime economic dislocation was a double-edged sword. It curtailed woman's opportunities for regular paying jobs and

46. For these dichotomies, see Johnson, *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China*; Stacey, *Patriarchy and Socialist Revolution in China*; and Wolf, *Revolution Postponed*. For discussion of the usefulness and limitations of these dichotomous categories, see Hershatter, *Women in China's Long Twentieth Century*.

47. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd," p. 79; Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant*.

economic independence, and consequently reproduced the patriarchal family structure that subjected a woman to her "powerful" husband. But the same economic difficulties that jeopardized common people's livelihoods bred a subsistence ethic, which made patriarchal authority more conditional upon the man's financial strength and stability. As many runaway wives rationalized and justified their desertion by invoking such an ethic, their husbands appeared powerless.

The subsistence ethic had always been a part of Chinese patriarchal domestic norms. In his study of domestic disputes in eighteenth-century China, Wang Yuesheng found that a wife might initiate family strife on several grounds, ranging from a dispute over household budgeting, to complaints about her husband's moral failures (e.g., gambling, stealing, visiting brothels), to dissatisfaction with his restricting her visits to her natal family. Among these causes for disputation, the justification most frequently cited before a judge was economic insolvency. Wang further argues that "living in poverty and lacking subsistence directly affected people's moods, and when domestic life was overwhelmed by anxiety, conflict was ensured."[48] Wang's research was based upon the eighteenth-century routine memorials of the Board of Punishment. Since these documents only recorded criminal cases that carried capital punishment, for example domestic strife that led to the death of one family member, it is likely that there were many more civil cases and lawsuits brought about by disputes over economic livelihood in the local magistrate's everyday administration. If such a popular conception of a subsistence ethic had long existed in Chinese society, the economic dislocations in occupied Beijing and the final years under the GMD regime made marital relations even more volatile. More importantly, the patriarchal norm just became more entrenched under the subsistence ethic. When women could not rely on their own husbands, often the only choice was to try to find new husbands and new relationships, which reinforced and perpetuated the patriarchal system.

After several hearings, the court convicted Niu Hu Shi of bigamy and her matchmaker Li Su Shi of "assisting her into a bigamous marriage." Under the criminal code, the bigamy conviction carried a maximum punishment of imprisonment for five years.[49] But the judge sentenced

48. Wang Yuesheng, *Qingdai zhongqi hunyin chongtu touxi*, pp. 61–74.
49. *The Criminal Code of the Republic of China*, art. 237, chap. xvii: Offenses against the Institutions of Marriage and the Family, p. 99.

Niu Hu Shi to just one month in prison, pointing out specifically that the court had accepted her explanation of her desertion due to the lack of support from her husband. The lenient sentence might have ended Niu Hu Shi's legal troubles; but judicial officials would certainly have dealt with similar cases involving runaway wives, justified by the lack of spousal support, on a regular basis. As the economic conditions in wartime Beijing kept deteriorating, sometimes at a breathtaking pace, and thereby jeopardizing women's livelihoods, to run away from one's husband would remain a tangible alternative.

Conclusion

Criminal case files from Beijing District Court in the 1940s indicate that women's access to formal and gainful employment remained limited. They either counted on low-paid, intermittent jobs with local employers or pursued odd jobs to add to family income, but neither brought women a secure livelihood or helped them along on the path toward economic independence. A married woman's family provided the most reliable means of financial support; spousal support largely decided women's domestic well-being. When their husbands failed to meet a basic standard of living, women's very livelihoods were threatened. Under the pressure of wartime economic collapse, women found that men's support and commitment became precarious. The local economy was paralyzed by depression and hyperinflation, which devastated the family as a collective economic unit and put women at risk. Some women chose to run from one marriage to another to escape dire poverty. Justifying their desertion was the continued belief in the hierarchical conception of the domestic roles of a breadwinner husband and a dependent wife. The hierarchical norm claimed many victims, both women and men. It tied women's submission to male financial solvency and fostered domestic inequality by subjecting women to their husband's authority and ability to earn a living. Once a husband failed as a breadwinner, he was likely to lose his domestic authority and his wife's companionship.

When a woman ran off, she left behind a broken marriage and family. Unlike the late imperial officials who protected the integrity

of the patriarchal household by subjecting runaway wives to criminal punishment, the twentieth-century laws claimed to protect family integrity without sacrificing women's independence and autonomy. De-criminalization of the act of desertion shows that the new legislative principle recognized a woman as an independent and equal member of society. To save the institution of the family, the law limited men's liability in supporting their wives and redefined marriage as a union of two equal individuals on the basis of mutual support. Under the new legal framework, individual livelihood and family integrity became interconnected, and domestic economic well-being relied upon women's contributions as well as men's. Ultimately, however, the wartime economic crisis, as well as deeply entrenched traditional social mores, made it increasingly difficult for women to achieve in their everyday lives what the reformers had envisioned in the new civil law.

PART II

Among Neighbors

CHAPTER THREE

Women in the Tenements

After marrying in October 1938, Ma Liu Shi moved to Rufu Alley off of Zixin Road in the Outer-4 District to live with her husband, Ma Yongquan, and his extended family. As time went by, Ma Liu Shi found that she could not get along with her mother-in-law, and their conflicts grew increasingly frequent and escalated over time. Then, Ma Liu Shi and Ma Yongquan moved out in November 1939 and started living by themselves at Ruyi Lane in the Inner-4 District, an affordable rental in a lower-class neighborhood far from the rest of Ma Yongquan's family. However, Ma Liu Shi soon realized that her new freedom from her mother-in-law's watchful eyes came at a hefty cost. She was no longer living in the big household where all members of the family contributed to collective expenses, and she had to rely solely on her husband's meager income from his job as a mechanic for a Japanese battalion. She was almost always on a tight budget. As her financial situation deteriorated, Ma Liu Shi had to move back to her mother-in-law's place.

Living there, Ma Liu Shi's relationship with her mother-in-law hardly improved. She "never joined the big family for meals" (*gechi gede* 各吃各的), and she had to put up with other inconveniences such as sharing the courtyard space with the rest of Ma Yongquan's family (including his widowed mother, his elder brother and his wife, and his unmarried younger brother), as well as more than a dozen neighbors. On April 18, 1942, Ma Liu Shi's life took another fateful turn. Her former neighbor, Han Gao Shi, escaped from home and came to her for help with finding a new husband. Ma Liu Shi arranged for her to stay with her husband's younger brother, Ma Yongmao. But Han Gao Shi's husband Han Ziqing later tracked down his wife and accused Ma Liu Shi of abducting her.[1]

1. BPDFFY, J65-6-4959, Ma Liu Shi and Ma Zhang Shi, 1942.

For over five years, from 1938 to 1942, Ma Liu Shi had been struggling to make ends meet and to get along with members of her husband's household. She had to teach herself how to manage her finances as well as navigate domestic relationships in a dense urban environment. She needed to think about, for example, where she and her husband would live if her in-laws' residence was not a desirable option, what kind of rental she could afford, and how to handle untimely misfortunes on a constrained budget. The decisions she made directly influenced her chances of survival. More importantly, as she moved around, interacted with new neighbors, handled household chores, and fought with family members, Ma Liu Shi and women like her claimed the tenement neighborhoods as a female's world of sociability in a male-dominated city.

Some lower-class women, both Beijing natives and migrants from rural areas and small towns, particularly in north China, found affordable housing in a few notorious slum areas where shoddy buildings stretched for miles and housed the city's poorest people. More commonly, they ended up in tenements where empty spaces were occupied quickly and existing rooms subdivided. Living there often meant families and individuals were cramped into houses that had insufficient light and air, sharing an overcrowded living space and public facilities such as the kitchen and toilet and enduring pungent smells of waste. The image of a cramped, raucous, filthy, and crime-ridden tenement neighborhood appears in many contemporary writings. For example, sociologists and social workers described the tenement neighborhood as a tragic landmark that reminded people of the laboring class's miseries.[2] For medical professionals, improving sanitary conditions in the tenements became the priority of urban hygiene policy planners.[3] Urban administrators were concerned that poverty could turn the tenements into a potential incubator of crime and moral downfall. Criminal activities in these tenement neighborhoods called for intensive police patrol and a public security campaign to revitalize the mutual surveillance system.[4] Records taken by officials and researchers reveal how they studied women's experiences in the tenements in order to formulate effective social and administrative policies. The official and reformist discourses show how the communities

2. Madeleine Yue Dong, *Republican Beijing*, chaps. 7 and 9.
3. Yang Nianqun, *Zaizao "bingren."*
4. Xu, "Wicked Citizens."

of researchers, urban administrators, and law enforcement made sense of the tenement neighborhood in their efforts to remake urban space and reform womanhood; but they hardly tell us the ways in which lower-class women made sense of their tenement neighborhood as a living space and social resource in their everyday struggle on the economic margins.

Criminal case files demonstrate that the physical layout and social milieu of tenements encouraged women to interact with each other. Social bonds grew over time, as women established their own world of sociability. Historians in recent decades have become increasingly sensitive to the construction and operation of urban social networks in late imperial and modern China. Studies of native-place lodges, commercial guilds, universities, political parties, organized crime, and labor unions reveal the existence and liveliness of social networks built upon various types of political institutions and professional affiliations.[5] These social networks formed important venues for fomenting group consciousness and developing distinct group identities. By holding the city's diverse political, ethnic, and cultural constituencies together and fulfilling many managerial functions, they had the potential of turning into a political force that overpowered the dysfunctional state.[6] However, major urban organizations in early twentieth-century Beijing were generally off limits to the city's lower-class women, due largely to the high unemployment rate and the low level of political mobilization among women. The expansion of lower-class women's social networks, as this chapter demonstrates, occurred instead in the context of the tenement neighborhood and revolved around mundane activities in their daily life.

The female-centered tenement network was spontaneous, self-centered, and self-serving.[7] It could enlarge itself in the field, but the

5. Major works on social networking in late imperial and Republican China include: Rowe, *Hankow: Conflict and Community*; Strand, *Rickshaw Beijing*; Di Wang, *Street Culture in Chengdu*; Goodman, *Native Place, City, and Nation*; Belsky, *Localities at the Center*; Honig, *Sisters and Strangers*; Perry, *Shanghai on Strike*; Poon, *Negotiating Religion*; Wakeman, *Policing Shanghai*; Martin, *The Shanghai Green Gang*; Hanchao Lu, *Street Criers*; and Dillon and Oi, *At the Crossroads of Empires*.

6. Rowe, *Hankow: Conflict and Community*; Dillon and Oi, *At the Crossroads of Empires*.

7. For the male counterpart of a dispersed and web-like network in Republican Beijing, see Sheehan, "Unorganized Crime."

network remained a personalized and individualized collectivity of simple relationships without formal leadership, hierarchy, and organizational structure. Moreover, the neighborhood network was unlike other intra-urban networks that proceeded to balance the individual member's concerns with the interests of the group as a whole. Lower-class women joined a network to advance their own individual motives rather than collective interests. The network was therefore motivated largely by individual circumstances and objectives without reference to any long-term agenda. A given woman's network might have been based in a particular neighborhood at one time. But she could create, operate, leave behind, and reproduce the networks as she moved from one neighborhood to another. This form of networking was never restricted to certain districts; it commonly existed everywhere in the city as tenement neighborhoods spread over all districts and suburbs in Beijing. Such a spatially diffuse and penetrating capacity enabled the networks to attune themselves to the mobility and transience that characterize women's survival tactics.

The tenement network lacked political intent and did not become a base for any organized action. Lower-class women had no political agendas. The network's primary nature was a fundamentally *social* praxis in its own locality. However, the network proved to be an opportunity and an outlet for women to connect with people in neighborhoods, districts, cities, and villages that were outside of their immediate home environment. It provided an important resource for lower-class women to raise themselves out of state control and economic turmoil in and beyond wartime Beijing.

"Walls within Walls"

Both places where Ma Liu Shi made her home were sections of a courtyard compound, or *siheyuan* 四合院. A common vernacular architecture, it consists of a group of single-story residential rooms constructed in the form of "wings" (i.e., blocks of rooms) around a central courtyard. The main wing, or the north wing (*zhengfang* 正房), has rooms with windows and doors facing the courtyard. It is flanked by the east wing (*dongfang* 東房) and west wing (*xifang* 西房). The south wing is either a

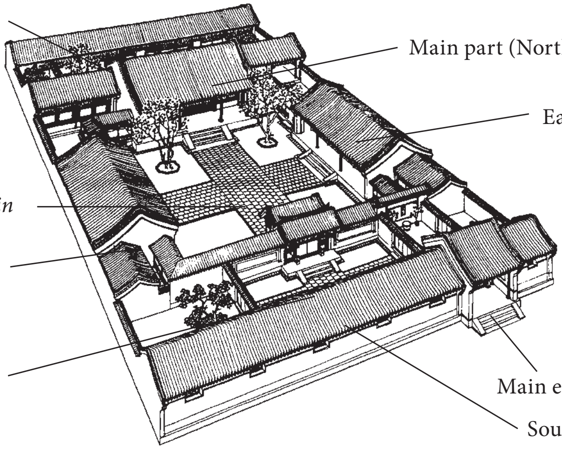

FIGURE 7. The Layout of a Standard Three-*jin* Courtyard Compound. Reproduced by permission from Liu Dunzhen, *Zhongguo gudai jianzhushi* (History of ancient Chinese architecture). Beijing: Zhongguo jianzhu gongye chubanshe, 1984, p. 319.

series of rooms or a wall with a gate (see fig. 7). In some compounds, trees are planted to provide shade from the summer sun. If there is enough space, picturesque decorations such as "rock mountains" (*jiashan* 假山), artificial pools, bamboo thickets, or a "moon gate" (*yueliang men* 月亮門, a circular gateway) are added. The size of a courtyard compound is measured by how many *jin* 進, or courtyards, it has. A standard one-*jin* compound occupies about 200 square meters of land.[8] A large courtyard compound could consist of a chain of courtyards connected by doorways and gates. To some extent, the most famous courtyard house in Beijing is the Forbidden City. But of course, it is typical only in shape, not in size. Most Beijing residents and certainly women like Ma Liu Shi did not live like emperors, even if their houses had certain stylistic affinities with the imperial palace.

Local histories contend that the courtyard compound was normally built as a residence of an extended family. The family-centered layout presents the courtyard house as a cozy and homey place where an extended family could enjoy a comfortable, content, and self-sufficient life.

8. Deng, *Beijing siheyuan*, p. 6.

Many foreign tourists and sojourners in early twentieth-century Beijing found the charm of a courtyard house irresistible because it embodied the cultural centrality and timeless tradition of imperial Beijing. This point of view can be found in travel literature produced at the time. For example, in an account of her stay in Beijing, Esther Frayne Hayes, daughter of an American professor teaching at a Chinese college, conveyed her fascination with this particular vernacular architecture in her diary. She lived with her family in the spacious and remote foreign faculty compound in a suburb west of Beijing, but she enjoyed riding on a rickshaw crisscrossing the labyrinthine alleyways and shopping at local specialty stores in the walled city, noting, "We know that the chief charm of Peking lies hidden in such quiet places; back in tiny, ancient courtyards, behind trellised paper-covered windows."[9] In these idealized descriptions, the courtyard house offered a kind of traditional familial experience: it captured the essence of social harmony deeply valued in Confucian teachings, and it also functioned as a safe haven, allowing one to retreat from worldly entanglements and embrace a private life of simplicity and tranquility. According to this romanticized view, somehow neither political revolutions nor the invasive industrial forces could disrupt the gratification and eternal peace that enshrined the living in a Beijing courtyard house.

Some Chinese writers were fascinated with the courtyard house as well, and they regarded it as Beijing's cultural and spiritual hallmark. For example, in his *Sishi tongtang*, Lao She began with a description of the house where his hero, the old Master Qi, lived. He wrote:

> The city of Beijing is eternal; so is his house. Now, Tianyou and his wife [the old master Qi's son and daughter-in-law] lived in the south wing with Xiaoshun'e [his great-grandson]. There are five rooms in the north wing. The middle one serves as the living room; doors open inside the room on the east and west walls, which lead to two bedrooms occupied respectively by Ruixuan [his eldest grandson] and Ruifeng [his second grandson]. Rooms at the east and west extremity of the wing have a separate door opening to the courtyard. The east houses Ruiquan [his youngest grandson]; the west is the old Master Qi's bedroom. The east wing serves as the kitchen and a storage place for food staples and fuels; and in winter pomegranate tree and oleander are kept there as well. At the time when he bought this house, he had to rent out the east and south wing to others in

9. Hayes, *At Home in China*, p. 113.

> order to keep these rooms occupied. Today, the house is not big enough for his sons and grandsons. Family members fill up the house; and the old master's heart is full of joy. He is like an old tree filling the courtyard with his branches. The leaves and flowers on every branch all are his offspring.[10]

The old master's joy and self-fulfillment expressed a distinctive sense of pride, accomplishment, and entitlement that the imperial capital could possibly bestow upon its natives, sojourners, and travelers.

Some writers, however, grew increasingly irritated at such a rosy depiction of courtyard life. They started to focus on other elements of the physical and cultural environment of the courtyard house, and their writings highlight the fact that the structure of the courtyard and the living arrangement within follow the principle of domestic hierarchy.[11] According to local customs, the north wing was reserved for family elders because its position offered optimized comfort by keeping the inside temperature low during summer and allowing for more natural sunshine during the windy and chilly winter typical in north China. The other wings were usually built a bit lower than the north wing, sometimes in a simpler style and with cruder materials. They housed junior members of the family and servants.[12]

In addition to enforcing the rule of hierarchy, the walled compound, as these critics noted, gave a terrible feeling of being "imprisoned," and of "claustrophobi[a]."[13] In his research on street vendors and colloquial language in Beijing, Samuel V. Constant, an American, tried to make sense of the cultural implications of the courtyard house. Constant came to China in the 1930s for a military position affiliated with the United States embassy in Beijing. After his military career ended, he became an avid language student and began researching local slang and customs. Like what many other foreign sojourners at the time had experienced, the years Constant spent in China became for him an eye-opening journey. He

10. Lao She, *Sishi tongtang*, p. 12.
11. Deng, *Beijing siheyuan*; Wang Qiming, *Beijing siheyuan*. A Canadian architect, Andre Casault, recorded his impressions of the courtyard houses in Beijing in 1987: "Three characteristics of the Chinese courtyard house seem to me to be very important: its introverted form, its symmetry and its hierarchical structure." Casault, "The Beijing Courtyard House," p. 31.
12. Wood, "Domestic Architecture in the Beijing Area," p. 94.
13. Lum, *My Own Pair of Wings*, p. 23.

was enthralled by the cultural accomplishments that China had achieved since antiquity; but he also felt a deep sense of loss and sorrow when he saw how the imperial splendor of China had faded and succumbed to the onslaught of foreign capital, technologies, ideas, and guns. Constant, like Chinese social reformers, looked to the material and cultural life to try and find the root of China's current weakness. From the binding cloth that women used to wrap their feet to the vernacular architecture, these reformers perceived these everyday objects as clear signs of a perverse and inferior Chinese culture in the modern age. Regarding Chinese housing, Constant wrote:

> China is a nation of walls within walls. They vary in size from the famous Great Wall of China some fifteen hundred miles in length to the humble mud walls of the country farmer. . . . In between these two extremes we find every sort of wall—city walls, palace walls, *yamen* walls and walls of the rich and poor. There is no doubt that these walls have profoundly affected China's history and the psychology of her people. In addition to this they have caused the Chinese family to build for itself a small feudal castle, so to speak, into which the family or clan withdraws and closes the gates. Within the many walls of China have been enacted its greatness and tragedy for centuries. So on a lesser scale the average Chinese family in their small walled compound is a fair cross section and example of the great nation they represent.[14]

To writers like Constant, the inward-looking way of life was not only manifested at the national level of policymaking, it also had an impact on gender propriety on a more personal level. Constant wrote, "The compound is their world to a large extent, certainly to the women folks, to whom going outside its confines is quite an event."[15] In his view, the walled structure and family-oriented layout placed women under a set of subordinating and submissive roles, as filial daughters, dutiful wives, and loving mothers as defined in the venerated Confucian norms. Therefore, the courtyard house presented a testament to the confinement of a woman's life within a patriarchal household and a metaphor lamenting their enduring subjugation in the broader polit-

14. Constant, *Calls, Sounds and Merchandise of the Peking Street Peddlers*, pp. iii–iv.
15. Ibid.

ical and social world controlled by men. These views of the family compound fueled the reformers' criticism of women's segregated life and their subjugation to men in "traditional" Chinese society. What others perceived as the very charm of such a classic courtyard house was to these critics of Chinese culture simply a clear and perverse sign of an outdated tradition. The key characteristics of a courtyard house, in particular the ostensibly family-centered layout, the "introverted form," and the architectural style based on a patriarchal social hierarchy, reproduced a Confucian family order and stood as a visual representation and a constant reminder of everything that was wrong with China and Chinese culture: isolation, parochialism, and patriarchy.

To many people, Chinese and foreigners alike, the courtyard compound "was not only an architectural contrivance" but also manifested "a state of mind," a family structure, a pattern of household authority, gender rules, and a moral standing.[16] Although nostalgic accounts recall it as a cozy home space free from the invasive political and industrial reforms of the early twentieth century, critics were worried that the compound was gradually becoming a symbol for an inward-looking and backward-thinking China, particularly in regard to the treatment of women. This characterization of an isolated and gender-segregated life in courtyard compound and neighborhood did *not* exist, however, in lower-class women's urban experience, as I argue. Since the late nineteenth century, a combination of factors such as population growth, the influx of people from rural areas and small towns particularly in north China, and wrenching hardship drastically and fundamentally changed the physical setting and demographic features of Beijing neighborhoods. A few courtyards maintained their original structure as respectable residences reserved for elite families, while most others were critically ghettoized into slum-like tenements. They were not a sanctuary for an isolated, self-sustaining, and inward-looking family life but a cramped, raucous, and filthy space that sheltered multiple families struggling at the margin of subsistence living.

16. Graham Peck, *Through China's Walls* (London: William Collins, 1945), from Elder, *Old Peking*, p. 80.

A City on the Move

According to a government survey conducted in 1949, about 20–30 percent of Beijing's residences were built in the fourteenth century after the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) made Beijing its new capital and in the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) that followed. Owing to regular maintenance, these Ming-Qing courtyard houses survived the test of time; they were fine examples of vernacular architecture and luxurious abodes of the rich and wealthy.[17] Another half of the residences in Beijing were built between the late 1800s and the 1930s. They shared certain stylistic features with the Ming-Qing houses and used similar construction methods, but they were smaller in size and often built with cheaper materials. The remaining 20 percent were either converted from former garrisons once occupied by imperial armies or were simply slums situated on the fringes of existing neighborhoods and often close to the city walls. In terms of property ownership, the survey found that 71 percent of Beijing's housing stock was privately owned, 21.5 percent was government property, 4.3 percent was owned by corporate institutions such as guilds and native-place associations, and 3 percent was held by foreigners. Eighty-three percent of households, or 330,000 in number, lived in rental properties.[18] What underlined such factors as the high ratio of renters and the variable conditions of residential rooms were the remarkable demographic and social changes taking place within the walls of Beijing and its courtyard compounds. One of the contributing factors to such transformation was the sustained migration of villagers to the urban centers during this period.

Restarting life in Beijing was a fairly common tactic adopted among lower-class women and men living in the villages and towns of north China. One such case involves farmer Tian Hua and his wife, Tian Ma Shi, who lived in Shunyi County in Hebei Province. It seems that the

17. Because courtyard houses were built primarily with timber and brick, maintenance on a regular basis was necessary to ensure that the architecture remained in good shape. As a result of this routine reparation, "houses undergo gradual but almost constant transformation. The rebuilding and repair rarely involves total transformation for salvageable parts are stored and re-used whether they are brick, timber or tile." Wood, "Domestic Architecture in the Beijing Area," p. 8.
18. Dong Guangqi, *Gudu Beijing,* p. 195.

couple's relationship was in trouble in 1940. According to Tian Hua, he and other family members had health problems, but his wife refused to attend to the sick, which angered him. But Tian Ma Shi had a different story: she said that her husband's grandmother controlled the household and that the old lady disliked her, causing her to suffer numerous abuses including but not limited to withholding food, insufficient clothing, and verbal and physical abuse. Unable to put up with these abuses, Tian Ma Shi ran back to her natal family. Tian Hua brought her back right away; but she ran off again the next day.

This time Tian Ma Shi decided not to let her husband find her again, and headed for Beijing. She first found a service job working in a private household. The head of the household managed a printing house, and through him, she befriended one of his workers, Ju Shangxian. In mid-1941, about a year after she abandoned her legal husband, Tian Ma Shi married Ju Shangxian and adopted his surname by identifying herself as Ju Ma Shi. She bore him a girl. Just as she was settling into life in Beijing and enjoying her new marriage, her legal husband Tian Hua came to the city in 1942, hoping to find work and probably to locate his runaway wife, too. Both goals were accomplished. He ran into her on November 11, 1942, and their encounter quickly turned into a brawl that attracted the police's attention. Officers arrived and put them under arrest.[19]

The case reveals a typical migration pattern among newcomers from adjacent rural areas. Some made short trips during the agricultural off seasons; others stayed in the city and worked year round. Hebei Province, where Tian Ma Shi came from, was the largest home province to Beijing's non-native population—it is estimated that more than three million people migrated out of the province between 1931 and 1937.[20] According to official statistics, in November 1937, in the wake of Japan's military takeover of Beijing, nearly 33.7 percent of Beijing's residents (506,066), which was 60.7 percent of the city's non-native population, came from Hebei.[21] Other local sources indicate that men from Hebei monopolized certain trades in Beijing, such as barbershops, public

19. BPDFFY, J65-6-5321, Tian Ma Shi, 1942.
20. Gao et al., *Hebei renkoushi*, p. 196, cited in Wang Yinhuan, "1927–1937 nian Hebei liumin wenti chengyin tanxi," p. 102.
21. Mei, "Lugouqiao shibian qianhou Beiping," pp. 24–25.

bathhouses, and antique and curio stores. They also made up about 40 percent of the city's rickshaw pullers.[22] Moreover, Hebei women constituted a significant portion of prostitutes, especially in lower-class brothels (18.3 percent of the second-class, 27.5 percent of the third-class, and 30 percent of the fourth-class brothels).[23]

When Sidney Gamble studied the pattern of migration in Beijing, he emphasized that the city attracted people, especially young, male laborers, from the surrounding countryside primarily because of its commercial and industrial growth.[24] In his view, Beijing at the time more or less paralleled what cities in the West had experienced decades earlier, whereby industrialization propelled massive migration.[25] People arrived from the countryside and joined the expanding urban working class, all while exploring the wonders of cosmopolitan culture and experiencing the pressures of the factory work unit. The effect of industrial and economic development on migration should not be overestimated, however. Madeleine Yue Dong has shown that recessions and depressions in the 1920s and 1930s significantly impacted Beijing's modern economic trajectory.[26] And criminal case files reveal that the arrival of large numbers of people, both women and men, owed less to the pulling force of the urban economy than to the rural crisis that upset villagers' livelihoods and compelled them to leave the neighboring countryside. Many flocked to Beijing without tangible plans and had little knowledge about what was waiting for them. War, the Japanese occupation, and the economic crisis all made it difficult for the newcomers to make a living. Despite these obstacles, people kept coming to Beijing in hopes of finding a means of survival. To them, Beijing offered at least the pretense of safety and security.

In Hebei Province alone, a combination of environmental pressures, political turmoil, and the collapse of the rural handicraft industry devastated the province and fueled a massive population movement to the city. From 1873 to 1933, the rural population in Hebei grew by 40 percent, but

22. Li Jinghan, "Beijing renli chefu xianzhuang de diaocha," p. 1162.
23. Mai Qianzeng, "Beiping changji diaocha," p. 495.
24. Gamble, *Peking: A Social Survey*, p. 101.
25. Chevalier, *Laboring Classes*; Sewell, *Structure and Mobility*; Stansell, *City of Women;* Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift*.
26. Madeleine Yue Dong, *Republican Beijing*, chap. 4.

the amount of arable lands decreased by 2 percent.[27] This made Hebei one of the provinces with the lowest amount of arable land per capita in north China. Some peasants "rushed to Manchuria" (*chuang guandong* 闖關東) for a fresh start in the northeast, where open lands were still abundant; others migrated to Beijing and other metropolitan areas to scramble for various low-paying positions and to peddle goods and services.

Rural handicraft industries, meanwhile, were struggling. In the 1930s, handicraft production was the primary source of income for about 30 percent of rural households; cotton yarn spinning, in particular, routinely took on surplus agricultural labor from Hebei since late imperial times. But when the emerging modern cotton mill industry in cities such as Tianjin and Shijiazhuang began to inundate the market with cheap, machine-made yarn, it significantly impacted the local fashion market. One county gazetteer noticed:

> Local residents traditionally made their clothing with "Chinese cotton yarn" (*tubu* 土布) and "home looms" (*jiaji* 家機) . . . and [people] always looked for strong and durable cloth and rarely cared about the color and design. Most ordinary peasant families followed this rule [when choosing cloth]. Since foreign [machine-made] yarn was imported, people opted for it because it was fine but cheap. Traditional Chinese cotton yarn and home looms became hard to find.[28]

This change in consumer preferences drastically reduced the rural handicrafts' market share and crushed the industry. For example, in the area around Gaoyang County in central Hebei, the center of rural cotton yarn spinning, the number of spinning wheels decreased by more than 75 percent between 1927 and 1933.[29] The demise of the rural handicraft industry had a devastating effect on many households, as it severely reduced the possibility for many rural women to earn supplementary income in the agricultural off seasons. In some cases, the loss completely destroyed their livelihoods.

The last contributing factor to the rural crisis in Hebei was the vicious cycle of political conflicts, military clashes, and banditry.

27. Wang Yinhuan, "1927–1937 nian Hebei liumin wenti chengyin tanxi," p. 106.
28. Ma and Wang, *Xianghe xianzhi*, p. 259.
29. Wang Yinhuan, "1927–1937 nian Hebei liumin wenti chengyin tanxi," p. 104.

North China had witnessed several military conflicts over the course of the early twentieth century: the Boxer Uprising and the following foreign occupation in 1900, two major wars fought between the Zhili and Fengtian warlords in the early 1920s, the battles between Chiang Kai-shek's Nanjing regime and the array of anti-Chiang coalitions in the early 1930s, and the provocations by the Japanese before the full-scale Sino-Japanese War broke out in 1937. For the various factions involved in these conflicts, the province of Hebei held strategic importance because of its close proximity to Beijing, which remained the national capital until 1928. There was also the Beijing-Hankou railroad that connected the politically prominent north to the economically developed central provinces. Thus, taking control of Hebei would allow local military leaders to secure their regional dominance and would offer an edge for political hopefuls competing for national power. But it turned life for ordinary people into a series of misfortunes. Warfare had brought about anarchy, plunder, and famine. The short-lived but increasingly violent regimes only paved the way for more chaos and suffering. Tormented by wars and facing formidable environmental pressures, many people fled to the cities.

To a certain degree, the city of Beijing offered protection to its inhabitants. The city walls deterred looters, bandits, and undisciplined soldiers, groups who contributed to conflicts and violence in the countryside. Sidney Gamble noticed that "when Chang Tso-lin (Zhang Zuolin) captured Peiping in the spring of 1926, there was no looting inside the city, but this was not true of many districts outside the walls."[30] Beside the walls, there were also local business leaders and social notables whose leadership, according to David Strand, "made it possible for residents to limit the burden and contain the dangers represented by armies clashing in the vicinity of the city walls." Last but not least, Strand points out that "the presence of foreign legations capable of threatening militarists with armed intervention and rewarding them with foreign-controlled customs revenues protected Beijing from most of the direct effects of warfare."[31]

For many women migrants like Tian Ma Shi, most factory jobs and educational opportunities in Beijing were beyond their reach.

30. Gamble, *How Chinese Families Live in Peiping*, p. 134.
31. Strand, *Rickshaw Beijing*, pp. 198–99.

But they continued to move to the city because it had something else to offer: a break from economic pressure, some relief from emotional stress, or a stable relationship that could offer them material support. Of course, not all dreams were realized, but the rural crises forced people to gamble based on a slim hope. In other words, migration to Beijing reflected more on imperatives that pulled people from their previous existence in the countryside rather than on opportunities the city could have provided.

Tenements in the Making

Migration played the decisive role in a steady but rapid population growth in Beijing. Government census records show a 71 percent population increase, from less than 660,000 in 1647, the fourth year of the Qing dynasty, to well over one million in the late nineteenth century, a year before the dynasty collapsed (see table 3.1). After the dynasty fell, the population continued to grow. The census shows a citywide population increase of 20 percent during the chaotic early Republican period from 1912 to 1928 and then another 11 percent growth over the course of the GMD reign from 1928 to 1937. Even under the Japanese occupation from 1937 to 1945, both the number of households and the overall population rose slightly (see table 3.2). Government surveys and medical reports show that the birth rate was not a main factor. Death and especially infant mortality rates in Beijing remained high over the course of the early twentieth century.[32] Migration accounts for most of the demographic growth.

32. For example, between July 1926 and June 1927, the No. 1 Public Health Administration reported a birth rate of 21.3 percent, a death rate of 20.0 percent, and an infant mortality rate of 18.4 percent. The birth rate shown in the Chinese report was just about 16 percent higher than that of England in the same period, but the death rate outnumbered England's by 72 percent and the infant mortality rate by 163 percent. Moreover, the report was prepared based on data collected from one community that constituted about 5 percent of the city population, and the community itself was fairly better off in terms of income level and development of public health facilities. This means that the actual mortality rate citywide could actually be much higher. Yu, "Beiping de gonggong weisheng," pp. 337–56.

Table 3.1.
Population in Qing Beijing, 1647–1910

Year	Inner city	Outer city	Suburbs	Total
1647	395,000	144,000	120,000	659,000
1657	411,700	150,460	121,900	684,000
1681	453,300	187,900	125,700	766,900
1711	566,600	200,100	152,100	924,800
1781	541,100	235,143	210,736	986,978
1882	479,400	296,711	309,344	1,085,155
1910	468,970	316,472	343,366	1,128,808

Source: Han Guanghui, *Beijing lishi renkou dili* (Geohistorical population of Beijing). Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1996, p. 128.

Table 3.2
Population in Republican Beijing (by year)

Year	Household	Total population
1928	270,110	1,356,370
1937	292,653	1,504,716
1938	308,513	1,604,011
1939	320,259	1,704,000
1940	324,422	1,745,234
1941	330,667	1,794,449
1942	336,812	1,792,865
1943	302,864	1,641,751
1944	303,729	1,639,098
1945	310,839	1,650,695
1946	319,547	1,684,789

Source: Beipingshi gongwuju [Bureau of public works of Beijing], "Beipingshi zhi gailüe" [A survey of Beijing], 1946. From Bai Shulan, Wang Muhong, Zhao Jiareng, selected and edited, in *Beijing dang'an shiliao* [Beijing archival materials], 1992, p. 15.

Table 3.3
Population in Republican Beijing (by administrative unit)

	1917	1935	1948	Percentage growth
City	811,566	1,113,966	1,513,529	86%
Suburbs	409,477	459,238	492,269	20%
Counties	1,700,914	1,911,810	1,879,694	10%

Source: Han Guanghui, *Beijing lishi renkou dili* (Geohistorical population of Beijing). Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1996, p. 131.

Beneath the surface of demographic growth in Beijing as a whole, there was a noticeable difference among different administrative units within the city. The inner city witnessed first a 43 percent increase in population during the first sixty years under the Qing dynasty, then a modest decline throughout the rest of the imperial years. The Qing ethnic policy is, to a larger extent, responsible for this change in population growth. The policy prohibited Han Chinese from permanently residing in the inner city; at the same time, it systematically and regularly arranged the relocation of the growing Manchu population to other parts of the city or in regions far beyond the city's physical boundaries.[33] While the population remained stable in the inner city, it doubled in the Han Chinese–populated outer city and almost tripled in the multi-ethnic suburbs. Demographic growth in the early twentieth century, however, developed in a pattern different from that of the Qing. Although the two administrative units beyond the city walls—the "suburbs" and "municipal counties"—saw a 20 percent and a 10 percent growth in population respectively, it was the "city" that saw the most drastic increase of 86 percent, from less than one million people in 1917 to more than 1.5 million in 1948 (see table 3.3).

The Japanese invasion and the ensuing occupation in Beijing also set a mass population movement in motion. When war broke out, the Chinese municipal officials and civil servants abandoned their offices and fled south as the Nationalist troops retreated. Faculty, students, and staff members at universities and research institutions were evacuated to a safe area in central China. Many civilians also fled the war zone.

33. Han Guanghui, *Beijing lishi renkou dili*, pp. 125–28.

But once the new political order took shape and peace was restored, newcomers began to flow into the city. Some came to take advantage of the new order in north China to build a political career or to profit in business, but the majority of newcomers came to escape from the effects of predatory rule and its incessant violence, as well as the growing economic hardship in small towns in the countryside. A journalist, Mo Qing, describes the refugee wave in Beijing in his diary:

> The scene at the city gates appears a bit strange. Once the gates are open, a large number of refugees squeeze in. . . . The number grows astoundingly bigger. The Japanese army conscripted a large number of Chinese laborers to build defense works or transport military supplies. But ordinary Chinese neither have good feelings toward the Japanese nor are they willing to work for them, so they have no other choice but to flee. Young women run off because they were scared by the Japanese soldiers. The reality is, where can people escape to even if they have to? Beijing is a Chinese city, they will still come here after all.[34]

It is significant to note that by early 1938, the city's population bounced back to its pre-war level. The small population increase seen during the Japanese occupation represents a century-long process of migration and demographic expansion in which hundreds of thousands of newcomers settled in the city. By the 1920s, Beijing had become the fourth largest city in China (behind Guangzhou, Shanghai, and Wuhan).[35] Most of these newcomers found a foothold in this walled city. The combined population of the twelve city districts reached the one million mark in the early 1930s and almost doubled in the thirty years from 1917 to 1948.[36]

How exactly did the local residential neighborhoods accommodate the successive waves of newcomers? How did migration and mobility change the neighborhoods' physical appearance? The following case of a delinquent daughter of a rickshaw puller and her home in a tenement neighborhood helps us to visualize the dramatic changes in the urban physical environment. Rickshaw puller Wang Zhenhui lived at No. 28 White Pagoda Temple Lane in the Inner-4 District. On July 15, 1946,

34. Mo, *Xianluo hou de pingjin*, pp. 2–3.
35. Gamble, *Peking: A Social Survey*, p. 94.
36. Han Guanghui, *Beijing lishi renkou dili*, pp. 128–31.

he found out that his fifteen-year-old daughter, Wang Xiangyu, had run away from home. As he was busy searching for her, his neighbor, a thirty-six-year-old peddler named Xin Fusheng, revealed his daughter's secret to him. Xin Fusheng lived in a rented room next to the Wangs' room in the same courtyard compound. One night in June 1946, he got up and walked out of his room to use the shared toilet located at the back of the compound. As he went past the Wangs' room, he noticed that the light was off inside and that Wang Zhenhui's daughter was chatting with a young man. He stopped for a moment wondering who the man was and why he was in the Wangs' room when the parents were not at home.

Almost at the same time, Wang Xiangyu and the man with her realized that someone was outside the room, and they immediately jumped out of the room. Under the dim moonlight, Xin Fusheng recognized that the man in question was Wang Lide, a twenty-six-year-old rickshaw puller living in an adjacent courtyard compound. Xin Fusheng also learned that he was Wang Xiangyu's boyfriend. The young couple begged their neighbor not to expose this secret to Wang Zhenhui. Xin Fusheng agreed and kept it to himself for about a month, until Wang Xiangyu ran away from home. After hearing the neighbor's account, Wang Zhenhui reported the case to the police and asked for help. The police eventually found Wang Xiangyu, and when they did, Wang Zhenhui decided to end his daughter's liaison once and for all by filing a lawsuit at Beijing District Court. He accused Wang Lide and Wang Lide's cousin, Wang Liyou, whom Wang Zhenhui believed to have been involved in the scheme, of abducting Wang Xiangyu.[37]

This case and other similar cases show that parents worked hard to monitor their daughters' behavior. They had a range of methods to do so. They teamed up with relatives and friends to observe the interactions between their daughters and their daughters' friends. Neighbors were helpful when parents were not around, as their watchful eyes often detected suspicious conduct; neighbors' gossip also provided information on secret relations. In the specific case of Wang Xiangyu and her boyfriend in the ill-fated relationship, the two families shared their living space with twenty-six other families and more than a hundred neighbors. Under pressure from migration and economic hardship, their world had been growing more crowded and

37. BPDFFY, J65-13-3762, Wang Lide and Wang Liyou, 1946.

confined since the turn of the twentieth century. All these pressures ultimately made for a noisy and congested environment for residents; they could sense it without even stepping outside of their cramped accommodation.

It had become a daunting task for Beijing as a city to accommodate the successive waves of new arrivals. The city walls formed a formidable physical boundary that prevented the expansion of the city population beyond this gigantic enclosure and into new suburban districts. Inside of the walled city, crowded as it was, not every inch of land was occupied. Imperial palaces and granaries in the inner city, as well as altars and empty lands in the outer city, provided sizable open areas. Mingzheng Shi and Madeleine Yue Dong point out that the Municipal Government built parks on the grounds of former imperial palaces and gardens.[38] Large areas of open land in the outer city became dumping grounds or were kept by native-place associations as "public cemeteries" (*yidi* 義地). In Beijing, the newcomers squeezed into existing population centers and neighborhoods, which further increased the population density.

Despite its chronic budgetary crisis, the Municipal Government made some efforts to build new residential quarters in the underdeveloped and less-crowded areas. One targeted site was the Tianqiao (Heavenly bridge) area, due south of the imperial palace in the heart of the outer city. The area occupied about one square mile of land adjacent to the commercial center at Qianmen district to the north; it bordered the Temple of Heaven to the east and the Altar of Agriculture to the west. In 1936, officials and municipal engineers began to discuss the plan of building a "common people's residence" (*pingmin zhuzhai* 平民住宅) along the road between Tianqiao and the Temple of Heaven. The primary goal was to provide affordable and decent public housing to the poor. The government invested 30,000 *yuan* to build 130 units;

38. They were the Central Park (Zhongyang gongyuan 中央公園) from the Altar of Land and Earth (Shejitan 社稷壇), the Ancient Relic Exhibition Hall (Guwu chenlie suo 古物陳列所) from the Imperial Ancestral Temple (Taimiao 太廟), the Summer Palace (Yiheyuan 頤和園), the Temple of Heaven (Tiantan 天壇), the South City Park (Chengnan gongyuan 城南公園) from the Altar of Agriculture (Xiannongtan 先農壇), the Beihai Park, the Capital Park (Jingzhao gongyuan 京兆公園) from the Altar of Earth (Ditan 地壇), the Coal Mountain Park (Jingshan gongyuan 景山公園), and the Middle and South Lake Park (Zhongnanhai gongyuan 中南海公園).

construction started the following year and was completed in less than five months. Eventually, the project produced a total of 140 units of housing, 28 public toilets, several pavements, a few gates, and 2 sections of wall for security purposes.[39] But when the last piece of scaffold came down on July 28, 1937, the city was plunged into chaos. Five days later, Japan took control of the city and started its eight-year occupation. The Tianqiao project therefore became the first, as well as the last, public housing construction funded by the municipal budget. However, the project was clearly more of a government's paternalistic gesture towards the underprivileged rather than a real solution to tackle the city's acute housing problem. The Tianqiao project, with its 140 single-room units, could only accommodate 400 to 600 people.[40] And according to the official census in 1934, in the Outer-5 District alone (where Tianqiao was located), more than 8,000 people were registered on the official record as being from "poor households" (*pinhu* 貧戶) and thus were eligible for public housing.[41]

Migration turned Beijing into a congested place. Sidney Gamble's survey shows that the average population density for the inner and outer districts was 12,983 people per square kilometer in the late 1910s.[42] In 1946, the number of people per square kilometer had grown more than 80 percent, to 23,107. It continued to increase over the next two years and reached 26,196 in 1948.[43] The population did not grow evenly across all districts. Some areas witnessed an even more drastic increase in the early twentieth century. For example, in the heavily commercial Outer-2 District, which was already the most densely populated district in Beijing by the turn of the twentieth century, the population density grew over 50 percent, from about 32,000 to 46,332 per square kilometer between late 1910s and late 1930s, which was almost twice the city

39. Tang, "Minguo shiqi de pingmin zhuzhai jiqi zhidu chuangjian."
40. The average number of persons per room in Beijing at the time was between three and four. Gamble, *How Chinese Families Live in Peiping*, p. 132.
41. ZQ 12-2-275, "Beipingshi zhengfu gong'anju shizheng tongjibiao" [Administrative statistic compiled by the Bureau of Public Security in Beijing], 1935.
42. Gamble, *Peking: A Social Survey*, pp. 94–95.
43. Bai Shulan et al., "Beipingshi gongwuju, 'Beipingshi zhi gailue,'" p. 16; Han Guanghui, *Beijing lishi renkou dili*, p. 334.

average.[44] Wang Zhenhui and Xin Fusheng's district was the third most densely populated district in the period between 1937 and 1945, with about 23,000 people per square kilometer.[45]

Court testimonies indicate that the courtyard complex where Wang Zhenhui's and Xin Fusheng's families lived was owned by a nearby temple and managed by a monk. The complex consisted of several compound units—the Wang and Xin families stayed in the inner compound and Wang Xiangyu's boyfriend, Wang Lide, lived in the adjacent east compound. Many of these complexes were originally built as single-family residences for the wealthy or were used as government offices, commercial workplaces, or religious institutions. As a result of demographic and economic pressures, some of these compounds were partitioned. Owners and managers leased compound units or wings of each compound to families and individuals. A wing is a free-standing building, usually comprising three *jian*, or rooms—the "space between two roof trusses."[46] As more people continued to move in, wings were further subdivided into two or three rooms, with each room having a door that opened to the courtyard.[47] Rickshaw puller Wang Zhenhui's entire family was cramped into a partitioned room in the north wing, and they shared the wing with peddler Xin Fusheng's family. Wang Lide lived in one of the rooms in the south wing in the adjacent compound.

A partitioned room-unit measures about 2.6–3.65 meters long, 2.13–2.89 meters wide, and 2.13–2.89 meters high.[48] A brick bed, or *kang* 炕, is built about 1.15 meters above the floor and measures about 1.8 meters wide. Three sides of the *kang* are attached to the walls and one side faces the center of the room. The *kang* is covered with a reed mat, and a flue is installed underneath in order to keep it heated during winter. A *kang* is an "economical device" and "may last many years with very little wear and tear and requires but a reasonable sum for construction."[49] The *kang*'s major drawback is that it is immovable and

44. Gamble, *Peking: A Social Survey*, pp. 94–95; Han Guanghui, *Beijing lishi renkou dili*, p. 334.
45. ZQ 12-2-132, "Beipingshi zhengfu jingchaju hukou tongji" [Population census prepared by the Beijing Municipal Police Department], 1937.
46. Gamble, *How Chinese Families Live in Peiping*, p. 129.
47. L. K. Tao, *Livelihood in Peking*, p. 104.
48. Ibid., p. 105.
49. Ibid., pp. 105–6.

occupies a large indoor floor space, more than two-thirds of the interior space in some cases. This kind of configuration usually reduces airflow. Ventilation can also be worsened by the design of the window. Large windows, usually "two or more pieces of latticed work" and "pasted with thin white paper," are common in a partitioned room, but these windows are usually installed on the same side of the wall as the door facing the courtyard. The back wall is left either windowless or with merely a small opening; both of these designs could make the room into a suffocating space.[50]

Quite a few people lived in each room of a courtyard tenement. In Wang Xiangyu's case, four family members from two generations lived in a single room. Cramped living conditions were not uncommon in Beijing at the time. In his 1933 study of family budgets in Beijing, Sidney Gamble collected data from 283 local families covering information on "the family income and the expenditure for food, clothing, rent, heat and light, and miscellaneous items during a month, or a longer period of time."[51] His sample represents a wide range of income levels, ranging from a monthly income of 8 to 550 Chinese silver dollars. A large number of the families came from the urban working-class sector, since the study stemmed from the "growing interest in the economic life of the workers."[52] Of his samples across class lines, 124 families (44 percent) lived in one room.[53] The crowding issue worsened noticeably as families' income levels declined. Niu Nai'e's study of 1,200 poor households shows that over 82 percent of his sample families could only afford one room. In eight extreme cases, the families rented only half a room.[54] The dense living conditions raised serious concern among urban administrators and medical professionals, who feared for the local residents' easy exposure to infectious diseases. "If the infected member of a family is sent back home," a British medical missionary wrote in her diary on December 13, 1947, "there is no means of isolating him from the rest of the family—they all sleep together on the big *kang* which occupies the one room of the house, and the rest of the family inevitably become infected."[55]

50. Ibid.
51. Gamble, *How Chinese Families Live in Peiping*, p. 2.
52. Ibid., p. 1.
53. Ibid., p. 129.
54. Niu, "Beiping yiqian erbai pinhu zhi yanjiu," p. 723.
55. Woods, *Life in China*, p. 66.

Public amenities in early twentieth-century Beijing were primitive, inadequate, and poorly maintained, and they failed to keep up with the rapid urban growth. The facilities in courtyard tenements were usually the worst. In 1934, only about 9,600 households citywide, equivalent to about 50,000 people, had access to running water. Three years later, the number of households that had running water increased to 10,500. But still, more than 95 percent of the city's residents depended on underground water or water carriers for their daily water supply.[56] Perhaps the most challenging and unpleasant element of tenement life for its inhabitants was the sanitary facilities. The sewer system, which was built centuries ago, was functional. But as it choked up easily, annual dredging became the only feasible solution to keep the outdated system in working order. It usually took months to open the covered sewer ditches and complete the necessary cleaning. During these months, "the air of the city was filled with the horrible smell of raw sewage."[57] Garbage stood uncollected and, in some cases, mounted "above the ground level of adjacent courtyards."[58]

A scarcity of toilets and a rudimentary sewage system also created problems. As Wang Xiangyu's case shows, the room units in courtyard tenements were not equipped with private bathrooms. Dwellers thus must share a public toilet located either at the corner of the compound or in the nearby alleyway. Night soil men were on standby to collect human waste during the day. They worked with an iron scoop and carried the waste on their backs in wooden buckets, then transported everything out to the fields in wheelbarrows. While trudging through courtyard compounds and alleyways, they "spread foul smells everywhere they journeyed, spilling night soil along the way."[59] Raw sewage and mounting piles of garbage and night soil littered the neighborhoods and transformed Beijing into, as a British diplomat's wife called it, "the dirtiest and most evil-smelling town in the world" that could "disgust at first sight the most hardened of travelers."[60]

Finally, many courtyard houses were undergoing a process of architectural decay. "The better-class houses are usually built of grey brick

56. Du, "Ershi shiji sanshi niandai de Beiping chengshi guanli," p. 57.
57. Xu, "Policing Civility on the Streets," pp. 37–38.
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid.
60. Townley, *My Chinese Note Book*, p. 234.

and are roofed with tile," and "a cheaper type of wall is made of adobe brick faced with a mixture of earth and lime."[61] Even if building materials were different, maintenance on a regular basis was necessary to keep all the buildings in good condition. During the routine reparation, "salvageable parts are stored and re-used whether they are brick, timber or tile."[62] Despite the restoration efforts, under tremendous population growth pressure, many courtyard houses in early twentieth-century Beijing were overtaxed. When repair and renovation were not conducted in a timely fashion, structures would fall into a state of disrepair.[63]

Locating Tenements

Newcomers were everywhere in early twentieth-century Beijing. In 1937, about half of the city's residents were natives of neighboring provinces.[64] Perhaps the most obvious sign of the diversity of the city's residents and sojourners was the mélange of dialects they spoke and the various kinds of regional and local cuisines that catered to them. Fascinated by the city's cosmopolitan character, Robert Swallow, a professor who was born in China and who taught in a number of Chinese colleges and universities in the 1920s and 1930s, wrote:

61. Gamble, *How Chinese Families Live in Peiping*, p. 121.
62. Wood, "Domestic Architecture in the Beijing Area," p. 8.
63. The deterioration process in Beijing's courtyard neighborhood continued apace in the second half of the twentieth century under Communist rule. Because the city was chosen to be the national capital of the new People's Republic, a large number of civil and military cadres and their families moved in. The problems of overpopulation and housing shortage further worsened as a result of migration under the government's economic policy to transform Beijing from a "consumer city" into an "industrial city" in the 1950s. Finally, the great earthquake in 1976 caused structural damage to courtyard houses that were already in deterioration, and yet "after the earthquake, various forms of temporary shelters were erected in the yards, altering the houses' original state and hindering proper lighting and ventilation" See Broudehoux, "Neighborhood Regeneration in Beijing"; Zheng Lian, "Housing Renewal in Beijing." Inhabitants then continued partitioning houses and appropriating courtyards for various activities; in other words, they contested over the limited indoor and outdoor space just like their Republican predecessors.
64. Mei, "Lugouqiao shibian qianhou Beiping," pp. 24–25.

> Here we meet men from the twenty two-provinces and hear every dialect and language from Hakka to Mongolian. In fact it is no uncommon thing for young Chinese to be compelled to converse in English in order to understand one another, for Cantonese and Fukienese are as Dutch to the ordinary resident of the city. Our next door neighbor may have been born in the Strait Settlements and speak Malay better than he speaks Mandarin, while our fellow guests at a dinner party may include a Szechuanese [Sichuan] general and a member of Parliament for Heilungchiang [Heilongjiang].[65]

Newcomers changed the character of the city in many different ways. Swallow noticed a new pastime in Beijing's new public parks:

> It is in the places of entertainment and in the parks that this medley of tongues, diversity of types is most apparent and I frequently watch a group of men, who are sitting together, and try to guess what province they come from, first by studying their features and style of dress and then, if possible, by listening to their conversation. It is a harmless and interesting amusement, and though at times one is badly taken in, yet with practice a certain amount of proficiency can be gained.[66]

In addition to contributing to the cosmopolitan atmosphere, newcomers played a crucial role in changing Beijing's physical characteristics. As previously mentioned, Beijing was prevented from expanding into its suburban area by its standing city walls. Larger real estate development projects were also absent because of the government budgetary crisis and limited private funds. Newcomers had no choice but to squeeze into already crowded neighborhoods. As a result, "the roads are narrow," Sidney Gamble noticed, "every available lot has a building on it, courtyards are reduced to a minimum and a large number of people live in each house."[67] Narrowing alleyways, shrinking courtyards, run-down houses, and congested neighborhoods characterized Beijing's skyline.

The rapid expansion of tenements in Beijing resembled, in some ways, the ghettoization that transformed some American and European

65. Swallow, *Sidelights on Peking Life*, p. 2.
66. Ibid.
67. Gamble, *Peking: A Social Survey*, pp. 94–95.

cities beginning in the nineteenth century. In New York, Boston, and London (to name but a few of the most well-researched ones), the domestic population flow and international immigration redrew cities' physical boundaries and district maps. Newcomers first occupied existing neighborhoods and gradually expanded into outlying areas. On the fringes of the industrial districts, working-class neighborhoods and immigrant communities emerged. The slums, such as the North End in Boston and the Lower East Side of New York City, were avoided by the upper classes by the turn of the twentieth century. Poverty, foreignness, and violence set the slums apart from other, more affluent, neighborhoods.[68] Tenements in Beijing differed from American and European ghettos, however. They were not confined to certain city districts or areas but were distributed in all urban districts across the city. Residential neighborhoods in Beijing had a mix of ostentatious buildings and dilapidated houses. With regard to the social makeup, the tenement was by no means a socially homogeneous or economically egalitarian world. Some families managed to get by with limited resources; others were poor and even penniless. Social differences and economic divisions existed and were made clear with a few explicit and implicit markers such as profession, income, living arrangements, clothing, and food. The previously cited account by the American social worker Fannie S. Wickes (see chap. 1) provides a glimpse into this kind of architectural and social fusion in Beijing's tenement neighborhoods.

Working for the American Board Mission in Beijing in 1920, Wickes lived inside her church compound in the Dengshikou area, immediately east of the Forbidden City. Rebuilt in 1902 with combined funds from the Mission and the Boxer Indemnity, the church compound was, according to Sidney Gamble, "a beautiful example of Gothic architecture."[69] Immediately off the main street stood a school, a chapel, and the headquarters of the Women's Christian Temperance Union; and through a large gateway in the adjacent complex there were the church and parish house, a girls' school, a building for women's work, and six residences for the foreign workers. Gamble, who once sampled households there, spoke of the complex as "one of the beauty spots of Peking." "To those who come from other lands," he wrote, "it is one of the few places in

68. Deutsch, *Women and the City*, p. 6.
69. Gamble, *Peking: A Social Survey*, p. 142.

the city where green grass can be seen."[70] The church complex also had some high-profile neighbors, including the sprawling residence of a Mongolian Prince, the headquarters of the police and Military Guard, the women's college of Peking University—and a foreign-style mansion owned by a retired Chinese cabinet member.[71]

According to government-issued land property valuation instructions, which classified the city's land according to twenty levels, the American Board Mission complex was valued as Level 2, which is the second highest on the price chart. The complex was surrounded immediately by three alleyways on three sides; and there were another six alleyways on the same block. Of these nine nearby alleyways, one was of Level 4 and eight were of Level 6. The Inner-1 District, where the church neighborhood was located, comprised lands of different price classes spanning from Level 1 to Level 13. In other words, the neighborhood had a mix of buildings of different land values, architectural styles, building materials, levels of amenities, and degrees of maintenance. The most highly valued one was a multistory building in a foreign style with a reinforced concrete floor. The lesser-valued ones were usually built with "adobe brick faced with a mixture of earth and lime" (*shihuifang* 石灰房). The worst type of building material was "packed mud" (*tufang* 土房).[72]

Wickes's residence was behind "a high wall and a big red gate at the end of a little blind alley." "The arm of the main alley, or narrow street," she wrote, "is less than 50 yards long, and the gray walls are each broken on both sides by three gates."[73] Behind each gate, however, a dingy compound housed several Chinese families. Each compound might have its own character and rhythm of order or bundle of chaos, but they shared the same community space. Tenements were not confined to the city's peripheral areas but stood only an arm's-length away from the affluent locales.

70. Ibid.
71. Wickes. "My Nearest Neighbors in Peking," in Gamble, *Peking: A Social Survey*, pp. 324–26.
72. BPSMZJ, J3-1-70, "Beipingshi biaozhun dijia ji jianzhu gailiang wujiabiao" [Standard price chart of land property and building structure in Beijing], July 1, 1947.
73. Wickes, "My nearest neighbors in Peking," in Gamble, *Peking: A Social Survey*, pp. 331–32.

The short journey from the American Board Mission compound to the nearby Chinese tenement corresponded to a steep decline in the socioeconomic ladder (see fig. 8). Wickes's laboring-class neighbors included shoemakers, rickshaw pullers, barbers, and prostitutes; apart from them, there also lived a "capitalist"—"owner of 50 ricksha(w)s that [were] rented by the day to those who pull them"—and an elite military family whose home had often been visited by "satin-and-fur-lined friends."[74] While some families struggled in abject poverty and suffered health problems, a soldier's family there could afford to purchase a slave girl to take care of the housework. Tenement children were not necessarily all deprived of education or opportunities for a better future, but different families made different choices. For example, the son of the shoemaker worked days and nights to help his father make "quilted satin shoes with fur edges"; but the rickshaw owner's family supported its children's education, and the daughter attended school with her brothers.[75]

Sociologists' research and fictional accounts written during this period confirmed and added further details to Wickes's observations. Poverty-stricken families were more likely to reside in congested courtyard tenements. Most of them were either rickshaw pullers who had already passed their prime age, or poorly paid peddlers and menials. Fresh vegetables were completely beyond their reach, and their daily meals usually consisted of corn flour, sweet potato, millet, and pickle. Even while cutting back on daily necessities and food and huddling together in one run-down room with a leaking roof, these families often found themselves still falling behind on rent.[76] The prolific writer Lao She captured in the fictional world of rickshaw puller Xiangzi the depressing side of living in a tenement neighborhood and the struggles of women in particular. He wrote:

> Worst off were the old people and the women. The old people lacked clothing and food and had to lie on the ice-cold k'ang, waiting until the young ones brought a little money home so they could eat a bowl of congee. Perhaps the young workers managed to sell their strength to earn money but they might also come back empty-handed. They had to find some way

74. Ibid.
75. Ibid.
76. Li Jinghan, "Beiping zuidi xiandu de shenghuo chengdu de taolun," p. 3.

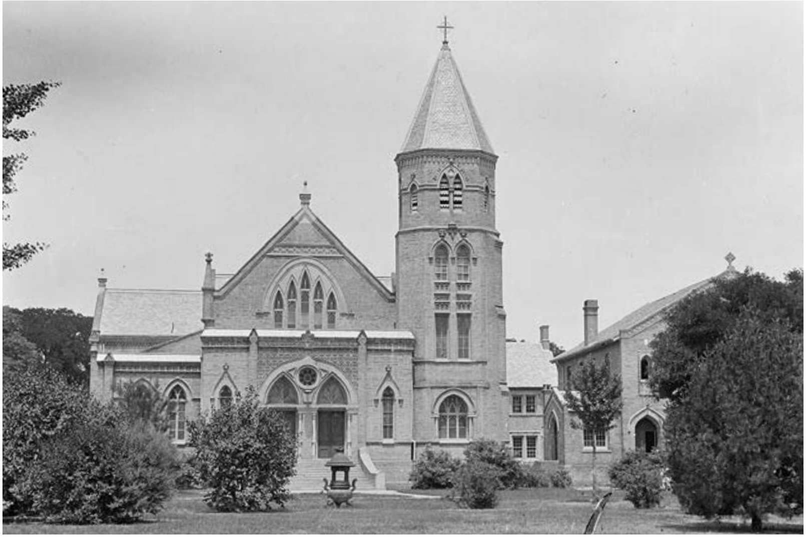

Figure 8a. The American Board Mission Church, where Mrs. Fannie S. Wickes's parsonage was located. Sidney D. Gamble, photographer. Courtesy of Sidney D. Gamble Photographs, Archive of Documentary Arts, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, image: 290A_1660.

Figure 8b. Tenements of Mrs. Wickes's Chinese neighbors located near the church. Sidney D. Gamble, photographer. Courtesy of Sidney D. Gamble Photographs, Archive of Documentary Arts, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, image: 263A_1501.

> to relieve their rage when they came back so they'd look for something to argue about. The old people with their empty stomachs had to make their tears serve as water and swallowed them down.
>
> The women took care of the old people, tended to the young, and had to mollify the men as well. They still had to do their usual work even when pregnant and had only bran cakes and sweet potato congee to eat. Not only did they have to do their usual work, they also had to get the congee and try to do some sewing on the side. Fortunately, both young and old lay down when they had eaten and then the women could sit close to a small kerosene lamp, washing, cooking, sewing, and mending. The rooms were so small and the walls so dilapidated that the cold wind could blast right through the openings between the bricks on one side. Straight across the room it would blow and out the other side, taking whatever warmth there was inside along. All that covered their bodies was some ragged cloth. They might have a bowlful or half a bowlful of congee in their bellies and may be there was a six or seven month old fetus there too. They had to work and also see to it that the young and old were fed first. They were always ill and their hair fell out before they were thirty but they could not rest an hour or even a minute as they progressed from sickness to death. When they died their families had to go to someone charitable and ask for the money for a coffin.
>
> The girls of sixteen or seventeen had no trousers. All they could do was sit inside wrapped up in some tattered thing in a room that was a natural prison, helping their mothers get the work done as quickly as possible. They had to wait till the courtyard was empty to go to the privy and then run like a thief.[77]

There were also people who were poor but not penniless. Their backbreaking labor brought home something, though aging, declining physical vigor, unexpected illness, or temporary unemployment could all throw them into destitution. In Gamble's study of 283 family budgets, 116 families belonged to this group, and among these, 113 lived in one room with an average of three or four people per room. He concluded, "The rent of an extra room was such a considerable item that these low-income families could not well undertake it without a considerable increase in their income." And even if their income did increase, it "had to be used for food" rather than "renting additional space."[78]

77. Lao She, *Rickshaw*, pp. 150–51.
78. Gamble, *How Chinese Families Live in Peiping*, pp. 129–32.

The tenements housed a diverse group of residents who were heterogeneous in terms of their native-place origins, occupations and professions, income levels, and overall financial wellbeing. There could be families from a wide range of economic standings even within one courtyard compound. At the lower end, families battled economic uncertainty and often went for long periods with no income. They took up residency in the tenements because they did not have any other options. Other local residents, as Wickes's experience demonstrates, had fairly steady incomes and could have afforded to live in a larger room or in a nicer neighborhood, but they were willing to sacrifice a larger living space so that they could pay for other basic necessities. The presence of these "better-off" residents in the tenements demonstrates their sense of financial insecurity; it also shows how precarious their situation was, and how easily their financial confidence could erode in the midst of regime change, civil war, foreign occupation, and inflation.

Stigmatizing the Tenement

Tenements in European and American cities had long been depicted as centers of violence and disorder in police reports and social surveys. Their troubling presence called for both the disciplinary authority of the municipal police and the moral guidance of social reform movements. In this regard, Beijing was no different from cities in the West. Both criminal case files and contemporary social surveys highlight a number of concerning elements of the tenement neighborhood. One family's misery was exposed to the watchful eyes of neighbors and became the subject of gossip. Poverty took its toll on domestic relationships. Criminal enterprises looked for opportunities to make illegal gains by taking advantage of people in hopeless situations.

WATCHFUL EYES

Being under the watchful eyes of one's neighbors, and the consequent lack of a certain level of privacy, characterized the courtyard milieu. As Wickes's field report illustrates, domestic duties and family events (e.g., weddings and funerals) were conducted in the public context and

witnessed by neighbors. The enforced closeness with neighbors also exposed one's material life, family strife, struggles with addiction, and moral failures to closer scrutiny. For instance, at No. 4, the wife of the rickshaw puller was an "untidy" woman, "who is never seen without a cigarette."[79] Addiction also made its way into the nearby soldier's family. Two women there, the old mother and the young wife, "take turns smoking the water-pipe, unless they happen to prefer cigarettes."[80] Wickes also encountered a homeless woman in the neighborhood. She was "dirty and disheveled" and "her dull eyes and stolid look mark her as of rather low grade intelligence."[81] She had become the subject of gossip after being in the neighborhood for just a little while; her stories became public knowledge, which brought her both sympathy and criticism. Neighbors said that the woman was a victim of spousal abandonment; whereas she could have shared part of the blame for her unfortunate situation, since she was never a "good manager" herself—she bought "from the street venders their most attractive but less economical foods, and so has nothing left to pay for washing water."[82]

Watching people suffering, some neighbors stepped in and offered a range of assistance—from a meal, to several pieces of clothing, to a small sum of loan; others were prepared to turn the dire situation into an opportunity for making a quick fortune. In one case, a twenty-three-year-old woman named Zhang Zhang Shi ran away from home on April 16, 1943. She had married a barber named Zhang Yongyi at the age of nineteen and had been living with him, his mother, and his three younger brothers in a courtyard compound at No. 83 Xitao Lane in the Inner-5 District. When her husband went out to work, Zhang Zhang Shi often dropped by her neighbor Gao De Shi's home, which was located across the narrow lane at No. 82. During one of these visits, Gao De Shi noticed Zhang Zhang Shi's pale complexion and patched clothing, and they started talking about Zhang Zhang Shi's quality of life. She admitted that her husband earned little and she had been living an impoverished life for years. Gao De Shi suggested to her that

79. Wickes, "My nearest neighbors in Peking," in Gamble, *Peking: A Social Survey*, p. 332.
80. Ibid.
81. Ibid., p. 334.
82. Ibid., p. 334.

she should consider finding a new husband in order to end her present misery, and if she was open to this idea, Gao De Shi said she could help. Gao De Shi knew a butcher from her hometown in Shandong Province who "had a few parcels of farmland and houses at home" and would be able to secure Zhang Zhang Shi a good life "with ample food and adequate clothing." Zhang Zhang Shi hesitated for a while but finally agreed to abandon her family and marry the butcher. Gao De Shi asked the wife of her husband's brother, Gao Zheng Shi, for help in carrying out the plan. According to their plan, Zhang Zhang Shi would run off after her husband left for work, meet the butcher at the railway station, and head to his home in Shandong.[83]

On the morning of April 16, Zhang Zhang Shi lied to her mother-in-law that she needed to get back the money that her husband's younger brother borrowed from her. After leaving home, she rushed to Qianmen East Station, where the butcher was waiting for her. But before they could board the train, the Japanese police stopped them at the security checkpoint to examine their residence cards. The problem was that Zhang Zhang Shi had brought her travel documents with her but not her residence card. The Japanese police did not listen to her explanation, and they tossed out her papers and threw her out of the station. Since she could not leave Beijing, the butcher just walked away and left Zhang Zhang Shi wandering on the streets by herself. She later went back home in the evening, as she had nowhere to go. When members of her family asked where she had been during the day, Zhang Zhang Shi revealed her desertion plot. Her husband was in a rage and immediately reported the incident to the police. The officers arrested Gao De Shi and Gao Zheng Shi soon after.

A neighbor's involvement and intervention in one's domestic routines not only brought mixed results but also compromised the boundary that separated public space and private domain. To women living in the courtyard neighborhood, the two spheres were not polar-opposite zones but appeared inseparable and interlocked, maintaining continuing relationships and negotiations.

83. BPDFFY, J65-7-3389, Gao De Shi and Gao Zheng Shi, 1943.

MORAL AMBIGUITIES

Social reformers and city officials were concerned not only about the deplorable living conditions and the financial hardships these residents in the tenement neighborhoods experienced, but also about the moral downfall attributed to the struggles in their material lives. Chapter 1 has demonstrated that neighborhoods harbored various forms of sexual transactions such as seasonal sex trade and women trafficking; but not all sexual contacts that unfolded in the neighborhood were commercial in nature. Some started with simple acts of borrowing and lending basic daily necessities; these exchanges might at some point lead to an expectation of sexual favors. In one case, a thirty-year-old factory worker, Wang Qingliang, lived with his wife, Wang Li Shi, at No. 3 Jixian Alley in the Outer-5 District. The couple was on good terms, though money was always tight. In 1939, Wang Qingliang left home for an extended business trip in Shanxi Province. He returned home in mid-1940 and learned that his wife was pregnant. Although Wang Li Shi insisted that he was the father of the unborn child, Wang Qingliang found it hard to believe and took the matter into his own hands to investigate. Later his sister provided an invaluable tip. She heard rumors that Wang Li Shi had been acting frivolously while her husband was away and staying unusually close to her neighbor, a twenty-year-old commercial painter named Zhao Yu. But before Wang Qingliang confronted his wife, Wang Li Shi ran off, and Zhao Yu went missing as well. It seems that their disappearance proved the rumor. It took police two years to find the runaway wife and her partner. At Beijing District Court, Wang Li Shi testified that Zhao Yu had first approached her by helping her out financially. After her husband returned home and was suspicious about her pregnancy, Wang Li Shi felt she would not be able to cover up her affair and thereby decided to elope with Zhao Yu. They were away for more than two years, during which time Wang Li Shi gave birth to a son and a daughter.[84]

Romantic relationships among neighbors also grew out of casual encounters and leisure activities that took place around the neighborhood. These heterosocial relationships and sexual activities outside marriage often triggered lawsuits. As criminal case files demonstrate, the neighborhood became the primary social space where women

84. BPDFFY, J65-7-2903, Zhao Yu and Wang Li Shi, 1943.

interacted with people outside of their immediate family circle. The following case reveals how women could come into close and controversial relationships with their male neighbors through leisure activities. It involves a twenty-two-year-old man named Guan Weiyi. On August 29, 1944, the Beijing District Court convicted him of "seducing with consent a woman who has not completed her twentieth year of age to be separated from her family" and "jointly stealing other people's property."[85] He was then sentenced to six months in prison. The alleged victim was Guan Weiyi's neighbor, seventeen-year-old Wang Yinzi. According to the complaint filed by Wang Yinzi's grandmother Wang Liu Shi, Wang Yinzi was seduced into desertion a few months earlier, in May. To finance the desertion, she stole 2 quilts, 1 mattress, 50 pieces of cotton clothing, and 290 *yuan* in cash.

The seduction and desertion happened when Wang Liu Shi was out of town on a visit to one of her daughters, who lived in Tianjin. After she returned to Beijing, Wang Liu Shi did not find her granddaughter at home. Being blind herself, she turned to neighbors for help. One of her neighbors was a scissors sharpener. Because his work required him to walk around the neighborhood all day long, he seemed to know what was going on. He told Wang Liu Shi that he had seen Wang Yinzi behaving suspiciously. She had been putting on heavy makeup and frequently spending time in Guan Weiyi's home, usually for an extended period of time. Upon learning this, Wang Liu Shi hurried to Guan Weiyi's home and intercepted her granddaughter there. During the court investigation, Wang Yinzi testified how her sexual liaison with Guan Weiyi began:

Q: Do you and Guan Weiyi engage in illicit sex consensually?
A: Yes, it is consensual.
Q: How did you two start your illicit sexual relationship?
A: We are neighbors, and I have a radio in my home. Guan Weiyi often comes [to my home] to listen to the broadcasts, and so we fell in love with each other.
Q: How can you have sex with Guan Weiyi while he listened to the radio in your room?
A: I was willing to [have sex with Guan Weiyi]. It started one day when I was alone in my room and he dropped in to listen to the radio. I asked him not to leave and then we slept together.

85. BPDFFY, J65-8-5380, Wang Yinzi, 1944.

Listening to radio broadcasts was also called "listening to the talking box" (*ting huaxiazi* 聽話匣子) in local vernacular. Beijing's first government-run radio station began broadcasting on September 1, 1927, and by the end of the year the city's first commercial station was also on the air.[86] According to a survey conducted in June 1928, radio sets could be purchased in forty-five shops in Beijing, and citywide there were 1,950 households with radios. Due to the economic depression caused by the relocation of the national capital to the south, the number of individual subscriptions to radio broadcasts dwindled by half, to slightly over 1,000, in 1936. After the Japanese army took over Beijing, the municipal authority introduced local people to the official reconditioned radio set that could receive channels the government managed. There were 40,000 of these reconditioned sets sold in Beijing in the period from 1937 to 1945.[87]

From the end of the Sino-Japanese War to the Communist victory in Beijing in early 1949, in addition to the stations run by the government, there were seven commercial stations, two GMD military stations, and one run by the U.S. Marines in Beijing. The number of radio sets citywide increased to more than 50,000.[88] Folklore performances dominated the airwaves in the 1940s. The broadcast began with a half-hour business report in the morning, followed by local ballad singing (*danxian* 單弦). At 9 o'clock, traditional storytelling (*pingshu* 評書) was on the air until noon. The afternoon programs included various types of ballad singing, Peking Opera, comedy routines (*xiangsheng* 相聲), clapper talk (*kuaiban* 快板), and storytelling again.[89] The variety of radio programs allowed people to entertain themselves at home.

86. The first radio station in China was established by an American businessman in Shanghai on January 23, 1923. It ran a one-hour program every night and was heard on five hundred radio sets. This foreign-run station was on the air for only a few months before it was shut down by the local government. Dangdai Zhongguo de guangbo dianshi bianjibu, *Zhongguo guangbo dianshi dashiji*, p. 441.
87. The exact percentage of the households that could afford a radio set remains unclear. According to the government census in 1943, there were 220,545 households in Beijing's eleven districts registered in the ration supply system. Based on this statistic, approximately 18 percent of households in Beijing could afford a radio set. Zhao Yumin, "Beijing guangbo shiye fazhan gaishu," pp. 202–7; BPSSHJ, J2-7-471, "Di'erci peiji zhuyao shiliang pin shishi yaoling: hukou tongji" [The outline of the second food rations distribution in 1943: household census], 1943.
88. Zhao Yumin, "Beijing guangbo shiye fazhan gaishu," p. 208.
89. Chang Renchun, *Lao Beijing fengqing jiqu*, p. 121.

Radio programs are one example of the ways in which people with little extra spending money for entertainment found diversions at home. In their neighborhoods, people could find offers of help, emotional fulfillment, cheap amusements, and even sexual favors. These contacts brought about mixed results. Neighbors' involvement in one's domestic business blurred the boundary between public and private, but neighbors could also offer much needed help in social and economic forms.

CRIMINAL ELEMENTS

By the early twentieth century, most urban administrators and social reformers perceived Beijing's tenement neighborhoods as morally ambiguous places, hotbeds of civil strife, and a marker of social illness.[90] For example, sociologist Zhou Shuzhao in her research on abduction crimes in 1930s Beijing commented on the tenement neighborhood's criminal proclivity:

> The courtyard tenement is a "local special product" (*techan* 特產) in Beijing. It is such a haven for evils. Two things usually occur [in tenements] as the result of physical proximity, mixture, and various forms of close contact among dwellers: (1) People learn evil practices from each other, since they are "imperceptibly influenced by [bad behaviors] they constantly see and hear" (*e'ru muran* 耳濡目染); (2) People make acquaintance with each other because of such proximity. Under this circumstance, on the one hand, the seducer has the opportunity to organize his/her criminal group; on the other hand, the familiarity with the potential victim's background and trouble allows [the seducer] to watch [the victim] all the time and calculate the best opportunity to take criminal action. Furthermore, one can take advantage of the knowledge [of the neighborhood] to trap women victims.[91]

Zhou's study found that about 25 percent of abductors had been neighbors to their victims and that the neighborhood connection was the key component of these criminal activities (see table 3.4). Her study also found that in 26 percent of the cases, the abductor lived in the same courtyard house as the victim (see table 3.5). These alarming figures

90. Xu, "Wicked Citizens"; Xing, "Social Gospel, Social Economics."
91. Zhou Shuzhao, "Beiping youguai yanjiu," pp. 122–24.

Table 3.4
Relationship between Abductors and Their Victims
(by type of connection)

Relationship to victims	Number of criminals	Percentage
Neighbors	50	25.51
Relatives	40	20.41
Sexual partners	29	14.80
Acquaintances	28	14.29
Unknown to the victim (before the crime is committed)	13	6.63
Friends	12	6.12
First encounter	6	3.06
Figurative bonds of kinship	6	3.06
Employer/employed	4	2.04
Whoremaster	4	2.04
Workmates	2	1.02
Other types of relationship	2	1.02

Source: Zhou Shuzhao, "Beiping youguai yanjiu" [Study of abduction crime in Beijing], M.A. Thesis, Department of Sociology, Yenching University, 1933, pp. 122–24.

Table 3.5
Relationship between Abductors and Their Victims
(by residence)

Residential connection	Number of cases	Percentage
In one room	20	13.70
In one courtyard house	38	26.03
On the same street/in the same village	28	19.18
In the same district	20	13.7
In different districts	40	27.39

Source: Zhou Shuzhao, "Beiping youguai yanjiu" [Study of abduction crime in Beijing], M.A. Thesis, Department of Sociology, Yenching University, 1933, pp. 122–24.

helped law enforcement justify their security campaigns in the 1930s and 1940s.[92] Tough measures not only aimed to restore order to the neighborhoods but also attempted to enlist neighbors' watchful eyes to revitalize *baojia*, the mutual surveillance system.

The idea of including the neighborhood structure into the system of control had been widely discussed during imperial times.[93] The term *lin* 鄰, or neighbor, frequently appeared in imperial edicts, statecraft documents, and legal regulations. A good *lin* was someone who not only offered help to one's neighbors when they were in trouble, but also stayed alert and reported any suspicious activities to local authorities. This concept of "neighborhood watch" gave rise to the *baojia* organization as an administrative policy. First seen in the mid-eleventh century during the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127), *baojia* grouped neighboring households into a control unit, which was then managed by successive levels of headmen. Local people were responsible for reporting criminal activities to help officials make successful arrests; failure to do so would incur punishment or penalties.

The *baojia* in Beijing was first instituted in the fourteenth century as an important part of Ming dynasty founder Zhu Yuanzhang's ambitious campaign to restore social order in the wake of the dynastic transition.[94] In the following two centuries, several campaigns were launched to strengthen and reinvigorate *baojia*; but they failed for the most part and the system fell apart even before the dynasty itself collapsed. Immediately after the Qing conquest in 1644, the Manchu regent Dorgon issued an edict to reinstate the *baojia* system.[95] The Qing *baojia* retained the same functional structure as that of the Ming. Even though *baojia* was an important component in the imperial control structure and performed multiple functions, it declined over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In her study of real estate

92. Xu, "Wicked Citizens."
93. Hsiao Kung-chuan, in his classic study of the local control system in late imperial China, has argued that *baojia* was described in the classical texts *Zhouli* and *Guanzi* as a community-based mutual surveillance measure and that it was considered the best device to maintain social order. Hsiao, *Rural China*, p. 27.
94. Yin Junke et al., *Gudai Beijing chengshi guanli*, pp. 159–65. For details of Zhu Yuanzhang's campaign to restore social order after the dynastic change, see Brook, *The Confusions of Pleasure*, pp. 19–29.
95. Hua, "Qingdai baojia zhidu jianlun," p. 87.

sales contracts in Qing Beijing, Zhang Xiaolin found that 94 percent of the contracts signed in the early Qing period clearly listed both the seller's and buyer's *baojia* affiliation, and in many cases, the names of the headmen were mentioned to notarize the transaction. But in the early nineteenth century, the percentage dropped to 59 percent, and by the late Qing less than 31 percent of contracts mentioned the *baojia* registrations of the two parties concerned.[96]

The GMD Municipal Government reinstated the *baojia* organization in 1935. Despite the later Japanese occupation and the Civil War, the program remained in operation throughout the late 1930s and 1940s as an integral part of the urban control system. The twentieth-century *baojia* retained the same organizational structure as was formulated in the imperial texts. The regimentation included all native residents, as well as sojourners living in commercial premises, temples, churches, schools, and hotel suites.[97] The government expected the *baojia* organization to take on numerous tasks, such as keeping census records, maintaining local social order, enlisting people for local public works, improving living conditions, and promoting the ideal of local self-government.[98] The surveillance role was the most important. Local residents should voluntarily keep guard and report suspicious activities occurring in their *baojia* unit. The *baojia* headmen must keep an eye out for any change of household registration, for signs of outbreaks of epidemics, and for any suspicious activities in the neighborhoods under their authority. Once they detect criminal behavior, or if they receive reports about suspicious conduct from residents or subordinates, they must report it to the higher authorities immediately.[99] Anyone who attempts to delay report of or cover up criminal activities would receive a fine or face criminal charges.

In the 1930s and 1940s, despite the regime change and wartime occupation, officials devoted a concerted effort to reinforce *baojia*. For example, under the GMD government, in order to help local residents understand the significance of *baojia* regimentation and the implementation procedures, officials composed songs (*baojia ge* 保甲

96. Ibid.
97. BPSZF, J1-1-148, "Beipingshi sijiao baojiafa dawen" [Questions and answers regarding the implementation of *baojia* regimentation in suburban Beijing], May 1935.
98. Ibid.
99. Ibid.

歌), put up slogans in the streets, and printed out pamphlets coaching *baojia* implementers on how to answer commonly asked questions. In the 1940s under the Japanese occupation, *baojia* was an active component of local administrative structure to fight communist guerrillas and maintain local order. The last citywide *baojia* re-regimentation was launched in early 1946, after the GMD government recovered Beijing from Japanese occupation. Officials mobilized 252 teachers from primary and middle schools, as well as 102 college students for this campaign. As of August 1946, the city's 1.7 million residents were organized into 332 *bao* and 5,518 *jia*.[100] Nearly one year later, the system expanded to 343 *bao* and 5,825 *jia*, covering 339,263 households in Beijing's seven inner-city districts, five outer-city districts, and eight suburban districts.[101]

Political and social leaders kept the tenement neighborhood and women at the center of their campaigns to build a civic, clean, moral, and orderly city. Official rhetoric and reformist writings saw tenements as a disturbing and dangerous place, and they considered women in tenements as prisoners of the vicious cycles of economic plight, social dislocation, and moral degeneration. Social workers like Fannie Wickes were absolutely appalled upon visiting their lower-class Chinese laborers and concerned about the gulf between their progressive visions and the harsh reality. In Wickes's words:

> As I see these people I long for the facilities that America has built up for helping such. Here in this less than 50 yards is work for every agency for social betterment in the catalogue of an up-to-date American city. When will China begin to take up these problems in a systematic way? When her people have been educated up to a sense of social responsibility and have a foundation of morality—Christian morality—to build upon. Some of her younger generation have reached that place already, but as yet they are but a small minority, though every year increasing.[102]

100. BPSZF, J1-7-417, "Guangfu yinian Beijing shizheng digao" [Draft of the report on municipal administration in Beijing during the first year of recovery], 1946.
101. BPSJCJ, J181-1-402, "Beipingshi jingchaju ge fenju guanqu baojia hukou tongjibiao" [Baojia regiments divided by police precincts], December 1947.
102. Wickes, "My nearest neighbors in Peking," in Gamble, *Peking: A Social Survey*, p. 334.

Despite these disturbing images and reformist rhetoric, it remains unclear how women in the tenement neighborhood made sense of their world, activities associated with it, and people within it. Many probably found the tenements more supportive than disruptive. The watchful eyes of neighbors, the closeness and shared inconvenience of tenement living, and neighbors' involvement and intervention in each other's lives usually helped to form a large and resilient support system that allowed women to better cope with poverty and family tragedy.

Women's Networks

Studying the working-class neighborhood in nineteenth-century New York City, Christine Stansell argues that, while living in "dank basements" and "alley shacks," women's "domestic lives spread out to the hallways of their tenements, to adjoining apartments and to the streets below."[103] But it was precisely "in the urban neighborhoods, not the home, that the identity of working-class wives and mothers was rooted."[104] Likewise, the tenement neighborhood in Beijing, albeit a place of penury and distress, provided lower-class women with a venue to forge new friendships, to find and give emotional support, and to formulate their own plans for survival. A wide spectrum of women-centered activities—from preparing food to sharing needlework, from chatting and gossiping to matchmaking, and from developing new, sometimes illicit, relationships to making desertion plans—marked a distinctive rhythm of tenement ecology that was essential in helping women calculate survival tactics and cultivate their social and gender roles.

A GO-BETWEEN AT WORK

Forty-six-year-old Wu Cheng Shi lived with her husband and their grown son in Beijing in 1943. In December of that year, she became preoccupied with her former neighbor Meng Yuzhen's family troubles. Meng Yuzhen's husband, Duan Lantian, slaughtered pigs for a living.

103. Stansell, *City of Women*, p. 41.
104. Ibid.

The couple was barely making ends meet. In October, Duan Lantian heard from some friends that a better paying job doing electrical work on airplanes was available in Zhangjiakou, 190 kilometers northwest of Beijing. He decided to go, and Meng Yuzhen agreed. She stayed at home with their two young children. But it had been more than one month since her husband's departure and she had not received any letters or money from him. In order to get by, she pawned her furniture and clothing piece by piece. But the income was not sufficient to support Meng Yuzhen and her children. She could think of no other way to survive than to find another husband, so she went to her neighbor, Wu Cheng Shi, for help. In response to Meng Yuzhen's tearful plea, Wu Cheng Shi proceeded to contact two other neighbors—one named Wang Zhendong and the other surnamed Shan—for their assistance in looking for a possible match for Meng Yuzhen. Together they found a man named Shi Changzhong who lived in Zhuolu County, west of Beijing in Hebei Province. Shi Changzhong agreed to marry Meng Yuzhen and gave Wu Cheng Shi fifty *yuan* asking her to escort Meng Yuzhen to Zhuolu to complete the marital proceedings. Wu Cheng Shi agreed. On December 28, 1943, Meng Yuzhen ran away for this new marriage. When Duan Lantian came back to Beijing three months later, he filed a lawsuit accusing Wu Cheng Shi of "selling his wife for lucrative purposes."[105]

Several people took part in helping Meng Yuzhen run away from home. Her mother, Meng Ma Shi, came along with Wang Zhendong (one of the two neighbors who acted as go-betweens together with Wu Cheng Shi) to escort Meng Yuzhen to Zhuolu County, where her daughter would meet her new husband. For her role in the desertion, Meng Ma Shi later became a co-defendant and faced charges of "selling a woman for lucrative purposes." Meng Yuzhen's neighbor, Wu Cheng Shi, made a trip to Zhuolu by herself to finalize the new marital arrangements. Court documents suggest that there was a fairly long and deep relationship between Meng Ma Shi and Wu Cheng Shi, though the details of their connections are somewhat unclear. Meng Ma Shi claimed in her testimony that her friendship with Wu Cheng Shi "spanned two or more generations" (*shijiao* 世交). Finally, native-place ties can explain Shi Changzhong's place on this network map. He was acquainted with

105. BPDFFY, J65-8-2439, Wu Cheng Shi and Meng Ma Shi, 1944.

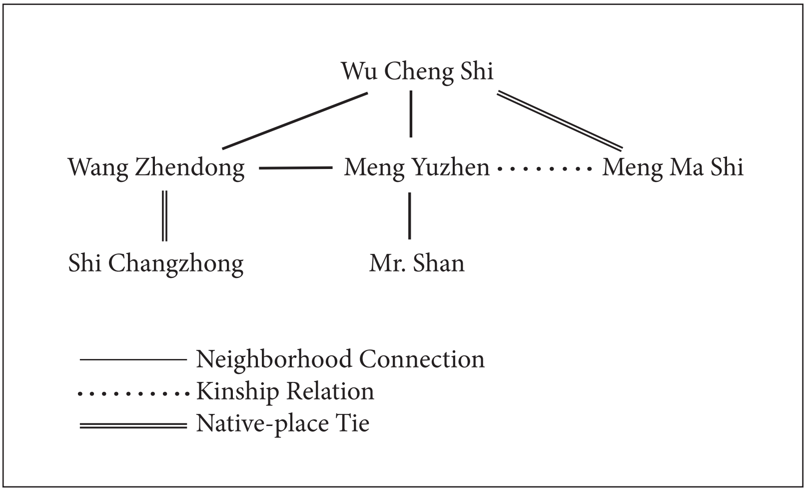

FIGURE 9. Meng Yuzhen's Personal Network

neither Meng Yuzhen nor with any member of her family, but he was tied to Wu Cheng Shi's two neighbors, Wang Zhendong and Mr. Shan; they all came from Zhuolu County (see fig. 9).

As suggested by Meng Yuzhen's case, the neighborhood network consisted of people from all walks of life. They came together through different forms of connections. Most of them lived, or had lived, in very close proximity to one another for a certain period of time. Their homes were either in the same courtyard compound or within walking distance from each other. Besides the neighborhood contact, the network was also built and expanded on kinship relations and native-place ties. Women in the network might be closely connected with each other through gossiping about neighborhood events, monitoring each other's comings and goings, and developing strong social bonds. It is also possible that they were merely connected via fleeting neighborhood contacts and casual customer relationships, and they kept these ties simple and shallow.

Social anthropologist A. L. Epstein once identified two types of networks: the immediate network and the extended network. The former "consists of clusters of persons fairly closely knitted together," and people within it interact with each other with a fairly high degree of intensity. The latter is based on a wide variety of people and an array of

social relationships differing "greatly in degree and kind."[106] At one end of the spectrum are acquaintances with whom connections are formed primarily through "casual and fleeting encounters"; on the opposite end is a range of people whom a given person "interacted with regularly, and with whom his relationship was relatively intense."[107] The network in the lower-class tenement in early twentieth-century Beijing possessed many features of the extended network. Wu Cheng Shi acted as the mastermind of the network, orchestrating Meng Yuzhen's desertion. The other people involved in the case maintained their own ties to her but did not necessarily enjoy the same connections with other members in the network. Such a network was formed based on a collection of different ties that were not stable and permanent, but flexible and pragmatic. People were connected, disconnected, and reconnected through various ties to the key figure or the task about which they were initially contacted. The purpose of networking and network members could also change over time. If the purpose of networking was something other than finding Meng Yuzhen a new husband, Wu Cheng Shi would likely have chosen different people. Or she would not make herself the center but participate as a member in someone else's network.

Most women's networks as seen in criminal case files were spontaneously formed in reaction to a specific opportunity. For example, women worked together and made contacts with their family members, friends, and neighbors to help bring a desperate woman into a new relationship. They could earn some easy cash simply by locating a match and facilitating the transaction. Other bigamy cases indicate that networks initiated by local neighborhood connections could eventually evolve into complex and "institutionalized" channels that connected women to people and places far from their home environment. A small percentage were able to use neighborhood ties to build a larger and more sophisticated enterprise that bought and sold women to meet market demand for women's productive, sexual, and reproductive labors.

Another bigamy case tells the story of yet another woman in an unhappy relationship seeking to escape. On the afternoon of April 19, 1942, rickshaw puller Kang Rui left home to start his night shift. Later that day, his wife Kang Liu Shi also left home to visit the temple fair

106. Epstein, "The Network and Urban Social Organization," p. 94.
107. Ibid, pp. 110–11.

at Spiral Peach Palace (Pantaogong 蟠桃宫), a small Daoist temple less than two kilometers northwest of her home. While she was wandering among food stalls and folk art performances, a man suddenly grabbed her by the arms. A quarrel broke out between Kang Liu Shi and the man, and passers-by were not able to separate them until patrolling police officers arrived. Kang Rui came back home late that night and learned from his neighbors that his wife had been arrested. When he rushed to the police precinct office, he was told that Kang Liu Shi was actually Guo Xing Shi and that the man who intercepted her at the temple fair was Guo Qingrui, her first husband. The case was quickly transferred to the Beijing District Court, and Kang Liu Shi was accused of bigamy.[108]

In court, Kang Liu Shi told what had happened to her before she married the rickshaw puller Kang Rui. At the age of sixteen, her stepmother married her to the twenty-seven-year-old tailor Guo Qingrui, and so she became Guo Xing Shi. Soon after their marriage, Guo Qingrui went to the British concession in Tianjin for work, leaving her with his parents in suburban Beijing. As they began to receive less and less financial support from Guo Qingrui, her mother-in-law told her to steal a neighbor's unharvested crops for food; sometimes, her mother-in-law would beat her if she refused to do it. In October of 1940, Guo Xing Shi ran away and became acquainted with seventy-three-year-old Liu Liu Shi; it was through her introduction that she married Kang Rui and started calling herself Kang Liu Shi.

The crucial person in this case is Liu Liu Shi, who sheltered the runaway wife and channeled her into a new marriage. Liu Liu Shi's role was made possible by a particular institution she ran known as an "old mistress inn," or a "female servant workshop" (*laoma zuofang* 老媽作坊) or "female servant inn" (*laoma dian* 老媽店). Institutions like this were known in early twentieth-century Beijing as places where women could go to find a job working in a private household. Local slang referred to the institutions as *jiandian* 薦店 and *jiantou dian* 薦頭店, or "employment agencies." Their official name, as registered in the Bureau of Social Affairs, was a "domestic servant job registry" (*yonggong jieshaosuo* 傭工介紹所).[109] These facilities were usually named after the woman who

108. BPDFFY, J65-6-1909, Guo Xing Shi, 1942.
109. Lu Deyang and Wang Naining, *Shehui de you yi cengmian*, pp. 38–39.

ran them.[110] Little investment was needed to open one: the most important facilities were no more than a few rooms, one for receiving potential employers and the rest to house women seeking jobs.

Most female job seekers faced a pressing condition: some were newly arrived in Beijing and lacked a support network that could help them with temporary accommodations and job search tips; others had just escaped from crushing poverty or an abusive relationship. To a large extent, they were at the mercy of others. The "female servant workshop" and its operator offered these women a stepping-stone in a challenging urban environment. Women who stayed there could pay for food and lodging themselves on a daily basis; or, if they were short of cash, they were allowed to stay in the dorm on credit and pay off their debt within a certain period after beginning to work.[111]

The women seeking work and the operators of the workshops were not necessarily equal, but they definitely had a reciprocal relationship. In Kang Liu Shi's case, she called Liu Liu Shi "grandma"; she probably did so in hopes of securing a stronger reference and hence better chances of finding work. Liu Liu Shi benefited from the reciprocal relationship as well. She counted on her candidates' success to build a name for her business and expand her social network, which would then bring in more requests for servants in the future.[112] Her seniority was probably her most important asset. Her age and years of experience in the business ensured a broad social network that would help her better locate job vacancies. As local history reveals, most operators were once servants themselves. Their previous work experience had familiarized them with the pattern of service work and prepared them to better address employers' requests and preferences.

It appears that women like Liu Liu Shi were able to use their social connections in local neighborhoods to help job seekers in ways that went beyond simply finding them domestic service work. After staying at Liu Liu Shi's place for a few days, Guo Xing Shi began to beg the old woman to find her a husband. Liu Liu Shi then immediately approached her two female friends and neighbors. Together they connected Guo

110. Li Binsheng, "Laoma dian," p. 468.
111. Zhao Chunxiao, *Jingcheng jiushi zatan*, p. 29; Li Binsheng, "Laoma dian," p. 468.
112. Li Binsheng, "Laoma dian," p. 468.

Xing Shi with Kang Rui. He might have been suspicious about Guo Xing Shi—she was a new arrival, a lone traveler, and no family members attended their wedding—but there were some tribulations in his own life, too. Kang Rui turned thirty in 1942, and at this age he had exceeded the average age for a man to marry for the first time by at least seven years. Moreover, pulling a rickshaw was a physically exhausting but not a lucrative occupation, and it was only a matter of time before age would take its toll on his career. Therefore, Kang Rui was not an appealing candidate on the marriage market, and he had to act quickly. To him, Kang Liu Shi was probably not a perfect woman but an acceptable choice for a man in his situation. The couple lived together for about two years. Kang Rui paid Liu Liu Shi seventy *yuan* in cash. She put two *yuan* in Guo Xing Shi's pocket and gave five *yuan* each to her two friends. Later in court, Liu Liu Shi claimed she only kept six *yuan* for herself and had spent the rest on the wedding.

Women with questionable backgrounds, especially those who were runaway wives, considered "female servant workshops" something like a combination of a temporary shelter, the first foothold upon their arrival in the city, and a launching pad for other opportunities. When runaway women showed up at their doors, the operators of these workshops were willing to turn a blind eye toward all suspicious behaviors so that they could make good use of their resources in the neighborhood and profit from the unfortunate situation.[113]

NETWORK ON THE MOVE

Studies of urban neighborhoods in the West suggest that local bonds among neighbors could be eroded by a number of larger forces, for example as David Garrioch and Mark Peel have pointed out, "by the growth in city size, by the rise of absolutism in early modern Europe, by the political complexity of modern nation-states, by industrialization or new technologies, by the Welfare State, by 'globalization.'"[114] Beijing in the early twentieth century, as previously discussed, also saw a relatively high degree of mobility and transiency. Criminal case files indicate that movement from one neighborhood to another was common among

113. Beijing yanshan chubanshe, *Jiujing renwu yu fengqing*, pp. 181–85.
114. Garrioch and Peel, "Introduction," pp. 664–65.

many lower-class people. Nevertheless, I argue that mobility did not inhibit women from either forming or getting access to neighborhood networks and ultimately utilizing them to their own advantage. Put differently, women's networking was strikingly portable and adaptable. As the following case will show, it was made possible, first, by the extensive distribution of tenement neighborhoods in Beijing, and second, by the flexibility and pragmatism inherent in the process of networking.

Zhang Wenyuan was a cook who worked in a restaurant in the Outer-2 District in Beijing. His job required him to lodge at his restaurant, and he could only go back home from time to time. Zhang Wenyuan's wife Zhang Xu Shi, herself unemployed and left at home alone, occasionally approached her neighbor Yuan Qixiang for help with food and money and sometimes even joined him for a mahjong game.[115] As they got closer, Zhang Xu Shi began to confide in Yuan Qixiang. She said that her husband was about to turn fifty-seven and that because of his age, his job was no longer secure. If he became unemployed, she would most certainly be left destitute. In contrast to her husband's insecure future, Yuan Qixiang's shrewdness and ability to make a handsome income from his trade of buying and selling second-hand clothing was, as Zhang Xu Shi told him, something she really admired. The turning point in their relationship came in February 1945. After playing mahjong one night, they slept together. The liaison continued for almost four months until June, when Zhang Wenyuan came back home for the Dragon Boat Festival. As soon as he stepped into the courtyard, he caught Yuan Qixiang dashing out of his room. In a rush, Yuan Qixiang mistakenly threw himself into the women's restroom. Instead of pursuing Yuan Qixiang, Zhang Wenyuan hurried into his room and asked his wife what was going on. Later that evening, Zhang Xu Shi admitted her affair. It appears that at first Zhang Wenyuan tolerated his wife's sexual liaison and did not press any charges against his neighbor.[116]

The triangle relationship took a drastic turn on the evening of August 19, 1945. The Zhang couple was taking a walk in the neighborhood after dinner to cool themselves off in the summer breeze. Zhang

115. A game of drawing and discarding small rectangular bamboo or ivory tiles until one of the four players makes four sets of three tiles (in sequence or in pairs) and one pair of matching tiles.
116. BPDFFY, J65-13-831, Yuan Qixiang, 1945.

Wenyuan walked a little faster than his wife, and after a few turns in the meandering lane, he turned back and found her gone. He walked back to look for her. As he approached the south entrance of Yanzhi Lane, he ran into his wife chatting with their neighbor Yuan Qixiang in a dark corner of the street. He confronted them and asked what they were doing behind his back. To his surprise, Yuan Qixiang punched him in the face, and a brawl ensued. Although the fight was ended by patrolling police officers, Zhang Xu Shi ran away from home three days later, on August 22, and hid at No. 16 Tangxianbo Lane, a place Yuan Qixiang had found for her. Zhang Wenyuan reported the affair to the police, and after officers apprehended both his wife and Yuan Qixiang, he filed a lawsuit against both of them at the Beijing District Court.

During the court hearing, Zhang Xu Shi testified that she and Zhang Wenyuan had married in 1940 in his hometown in Tong County, about thirty-five kilometers east of Beijing. Shortly after the wedding, Zhang Wenyuan decided to come to Beijing to find work; so they left for the city together. He was lucky to find a job, and he rented a place nearby at No. 1 Liangjiayuan Lane. In the following years, she and her husband moved twice, first to No. 23 Guozi Alley and then to a tenement compound at No. 19 Panjia heyan Lane, all in the Outer-5 District.

To people like the Zhangs, coming to Beijing was less a well-calculated plan than an instantaneous reaction to a shortage of money. After they left their homes in villages or small towns, they would then realize that the city was not necessarily a welcoming place, especially when they arrived without much money or a support network of close family or friends. Among the many challenges they had to face was finding a safe but affordable place to stay. Many of them chose to lodge at their employers' homes or in hotels before they further explored the urban world. But as their short trip in Beijing became a long sojourn, newcomers found hotels inconvenient and even dangerous. Room charges must be paid daily. Standard security measures, such as police raids and household registration inspections, could cause much disruption in their daily routines. Short-term stays and anonymity of hotel guests meant that a decent hotel guest could be living next door to a swindler, pickpocket, robber, or kidnapper, which might put one's property and life in immediate danger. Therefore, to many long-time sojourners, rented accommodation was a more convenient alternative, because it offered a stronger sense of home in an unfamiliar city.

In the early twentieth century Beijing had developed a sizable rental housing market, and there were also guidebooks instructing newcomers on how to find a proper place to stay. One of these books reported that a number of factors affected the rental price. Size was the most important factor. The cost of renting a four-wing courtyard house with fourteen rooms was 30 percent higher than a four-wing courtyard house with ten rooms or a three-wing house with eight or nine rooms, and double the cost of a row house with six or seven rooms. Location also mattered. Living in an upscale neighborhood was certainly costly. The book suggested that people should choose a place in the back alleyways, away from main streets or transportation facilities, to cut back on rental costs. Newcomers must also consider other factors such as security. For example, a freestanding compound was generally considered unsafe since it lacked protection from neighboring properties. In terms of hygiene, it cost more to rent a house with a spacious courtyard that could be kept clean easily.[117] Sociological surveys and government reports from the 1920s and 1930s show a disproportionally high percentage of renters compared to owners. Sidney Gamble, for example, found that 68 percent of his 283 families "paid rent for their houses during the entire year."[118] The percentage is even greater if families living in rented properties paid by their employers are included. A separate study in 1933 focusing exclusively on the city's destitute families reveals that renters represented more than 93 percent of the 1,200 households in the sample.[119]

Frequent changing of one's residence appears to have been common among local residents in Beijing. Criminal case files reveal that men moved because of unexpected twists in their financial situation and marital relationships. Women moved frequently, too, to escape an unhappy marriage or to leave a financially insolvent husband and start

117. To rent a place, local custom required the tenant to make three forms of payment upon signing the lease: one month's rent, a cleaning fee (*dasao fei* 打掃費), and a tea charge (*chaqian* 茶錢). The last item usually amounted to a month's rent and was accepted as a deposit. In theory, it should be returned to the tenant once the lease expired, but in reality, the landlords kept it as the rent for the last month. The cleaning fee was a tip "for the landlord's servants who were supposed to prepare the property for the new occupant." Gamble, *How Chinese Families Live in Peiping*, p. 128. The tenant also needed to pay a commission if he or she found the rented house through a middleman. Shan, *Jingshi jujia fa*, pp. 14–16.
118. Gamble, *How Chinese Families Live in Peiping*, p. 126.
119. Niu, "Beiping yiqian erbai pinhu zhi yanjiu," pp. 722–23.

a new relationship that would help them secure a more stable livelihood. The local slang called those who moved frequently "those who go around under the eaves" (*chuan fangyan de* 串房檐的).[120] Of the 283 families Sidney Gamble studied, 55 moved once during the year, 7 moved more than once, and 1 moved four times a year. They moved for different reasons, some of which included failing to make rent payments, having trouble with parents, changing jobs, or receiving a fellowship to study abroad.[121] The level of mobility impressed Gamble. "Americans are noted for being a restless people," he stated, "but they apparently move less often than this group of Peiping families."[122] It seems from criminal case files that many rural women's explorations of urban spaces were marked by incidents related to rented houses, landlords, rental leases, and relocation. The population flow kept the housing market active as people sold, bought, leased, and rented properties.

But unlike the privileged classes, who came with substantial financial resources and could afford to live with a level of comfort and luxury, newcomers like Zhang Wenyuan—an older professional cook—and his wife came from the less educated laboring class. Their housing needs fostered the growth of a rental market in less desirable districts, and the properties available to them included wayside inns and cheap, short-term rentals. Of the three places Zhang Wenyuan and Zhang Xu Shi rented in Beijing, the one they occupied when they had just arrived in Beijing was of price Level 6 on the real estate value scale, whereas the other two places they stayed were both of Level 8 and very similar to each other. This, in reality, means that wherever they moved, the couple experienced the same tenement living conditions and dealt with crowded buildings, reduced open spaces, and deteriorating facilities. Their neighbors would have similar experiences competing for low-paying jobs and struggling to make ends meet every day, and thus the couple could come to expect a similar pattern of neighborhood networks that emerged from casual and fleeting encounters.

Ties between women living in the same tenement were essentially weak. Moreover, mobility and transience made it even harder for women to establish and maintain a stable and long-lasting network.

120. Bo, "'Chuan fangyan de ji qita," pp. 309–12.
121. Gamble, *How Chinese Families Live in Peiping*, p. 127.
122. Ibid.

However, connections "involving less commitment of time, emotional intensity, intimacy, and reciprocity," as Elizabeth Perry points out, in fact gave rise to dynamic and contingent social networks. Building on Mark Granovetter's hypothesis of the "strength of weak ties," Perry argues that the webs of interpersonal, temporary, and spontaneous connections "may be more likely than strong ties to serve as conduits of information and influence" and "can function as bridges between otherwise fragmented groups, thereby facilitating concerted community action." [123] Criminal case files demonstrate that "weak ties" among women did not deter them from building networks; on the contrary, they made the networks both portable and adaptable. Mobility and transience did not inhibit women from accessing existing neighborhood networks or forming new networks. They were able to build and reproduce connections as they moved from one neighborhood to the other and optimized the advantages of neighborhood networking.

HELPFUL CONNECTIONS, SELFISH CONNECTIONS

Neighborhood connections yielded tangible benefits. People could turn to their neighbors for various forms of aid, such as food or small sums of money. Seeking help from one's neighbors became a key survival tactic for people who struggled to maintain a precarious subsistence in Beijing. That is not to say, however, that the tenement neighborhood was always a harmonious niche and its inhabitants were always helpful to one another. There were hidden tensions and open conflicts among neighbors, but these negative connections were also an integral part of life in tenements and were part and parcel of the broader network that connected people there.

When neighbors stood trial for their role in a marriage dispute, the common self-defense tactic was to portray themselves as concerned neighbors offering immediate help to alleviate their fellow residents' sufferings. They sometimes went further by accusing runaway women's family members, usually their husbands, of being the actual "troublemaker." It was these irresponsible husbands who drove their wives over the edge by not providing adequate financial support or by physically

123. Perry, "Popular Protest in Shanghai," p. 107; Granovetter, "The Strength of Weak Ties." Also see Sheehan, "Unorganized Crime."

abusing them. These neighbors thought of themselves as problem-solvers who helped miserable women escape from economic hardship or emotional suffering. Criminal case files, however, suggest that money was another important incentive for these neighbors to help someone in need. They took advantage of these women's dire situations to make a tidy profit. The most common form of profit was the cash payment from the man who married the runaway woman. Go-betweens were paid for their matchmaking service and for making all necessary arrangements to bring the woman from one marriage to another.

In one case, Fan Xu Shi lived with her mother-in-law Fan Guan Shi in Beijing. Her husband, thirty-eight-year-old bricklayer Fan Enpu, had been in jail since 1937 for his involvement in a murder. In early September 1943, price inflation prompted Fan Guan Shi to arrange for her daughter-in-law to be married so she could use the money paid for the bride as capital to sell matches. Fan Xu Shi agreed, probably because she felt that she could secure a better livelihood by doing so. Fan Guan Shi asked for help from fifty-one-year-old Tang Zhang Shi, who had been living in the same courtyard compound with the Fan family for years. While Tang Zhang Shi was contemplating a good match for her neighbor's daughter-in-law, her son-in-law Chen Yide visited her. Chen Yide was a gardener at a teacher-training college in Tong County. Tang Zhang Shi asked Chen Yide to find out if there was a marriageable man in his workplace. He agreed to help. Tang Zhang Shi had expected a quick reply from him, but when she did not hear back from him as the days passed, she became impatient and went to Chen Yide's mother, forty-nine-year-old Chen Jin Shi. She asked her to check up on her son. Chen Jin Shi came back with some good news. Chen Yide had found a good match, a cook in his school surnamed Guo who was willing to marry Fan Xu Shi. On September 16, Tang Zhang Shi and Chen Jin Shi escorted Fan Xu Shi to Tong County for her new marriage ceremony. One year later in April 1944, Fan Enpu was released from jail. When he found out that his wife had absconded, he accused the two go-betweens and his own mother of abducting his wife.[124]

The matter was taken to court. Chen Jin Shi defended herself during the court hearing:

124. BPDFFY, J65-8-3298, Tang Zhang Shi and Chen Jin Shi, 1944.

Q: Fan Xu Shi is a married woman. How could you find her a new husband?

A: We [Tang Zhang Shi and I] just made a minor mistake. We never anticipated that [to do so] broke the law. We were thinking of nothing but to save a person's life—to find a place where [she] could get fed.

The other go-between in this case, Tang Zhang Shi, gave a similar testimony: "Fan Gan Shi came to my room in person and begged me to find a husband for her daughter-in-law who would give her food and save her from dying of hunger."

Despite their claims of selfless support, court documents reveal that both neighbors received cash payments for their efforts. Right after she was remarried, Fan Xu Shi's new husband gave five *yuan* each to Tang Zhang Shi and Chen Jin Shi. That amount of money could buy about two *jin* of food grain for a day's meal.[125] Although the money that the go-betweens earned was not substantial, it was valuable to them because it brought them at least some food and other forms of necessities. Considering that these women all lacked a regular income, money from matchmaking would have offered them at least some degree of financial support. This was one of the reasons, if not the only reason, why we find many female neighbors were willing to take part in their neighbors' desertion plots.

Criminal case files show that neighbors could be both helpful and self-serving, both accommodating and unsympathetic at the same time. The tenement neighborhood was fraught with complex connections and internal disagreements. In analyzing social strife in the neighborhoods of early twentieth-century Beijing, Yamin Xu argues that "privacy was severely limited and no one would be surprised to see both inter- and intra- family conflicts breeding out all too easily."[126] Consequently, "it became more difficult for residents to form a closely-knit community."[127] As domestic violence and social strife were often not resolved by the communal mediating mechanism, Xu points out that "the intrusion of the state" into neighborhood and private life as the ultimate arbitrating force was unavoidable.[128]

125. ZJSJBPFJ, J211-1-4, "Beiping wujia pifabiao" [Wholesale prices at Beijing], 1943.
126. Xu, "Wicked Citizens," p. 175.
127. Ibid., p. 176.
128. Ibid., p. 177.

This chapter presents a different argument. Although urban neighborhoods were not necessarily "closely knit," neighbors certainly were much more interdependent than Xu's research has recognized. Conflicts within courtyard tenements reflect the ongoing interactions among local residents of the neighborhood. Members of the tenement neighborhood were linked to each other through different social ties. Some were altruistic, as we have seen in cases such as borrowing and lending a small amount of daily necessities between neighbors; whereas others might have stemmed from self-serving motives for profit or from other personal interests. Nevertheless, despite their knowing about these selfish actions, lower-class women still approached their selfish neighbors for help. Many women must have been aware that the help they sought and received was not necessarily born of a genuine gesture of selfless aid on the part of the helper, but they still sought help anyway because the assistance was within easy reach.

Conclusion

Early twentieth-century Beijing witnessed consistent waves of migration, even in times of war. Under the pressures of migration and poverty, some neighborhoods in Beijing degenerated into slums. The Longxugou 龍鬚溝, or Dragon Beard Ditch, in south central Beijing, Chaowai 朝外 (situated near the foot of Chaoyang gate in the east part of Beijing), is an infamous example of a ghetto of Beijing that accommodated the city's expanding poverty-stricken population. Overall, however, the city did not develop any sizable migrant quarters or working-class districts comparable to those in other major migrant cities such as Shanghai. The newcomers cramped into existing residential neighborhoods and merged with the native population.

The arrival of newcomers changed not only the physical structure but also the social makeup of Beijing neighborhoods. Most city neighborhoods evolved into what was by the early twentieth century a mixed world, with an assortment of well-maintained properties alongside the expanding tenement. The two worlds, physically separated by gates and walls, were culturally inseparable, with interlocking relationships and connections. The charming well-maintained properties

recalled Beijing's imperial splendor, whereas the tenements showcased the city's declining socioeconomic terrain. In the tenements, reduced open spaces and primitive amenities led to public health crises, and the promiscuous interactions between men and women and their transient relationships raised serious security and moral concerns. It was not long before the dilapidated neighborhoods and their struggling residents became a common marker of the degrading urban landscape and deteriorating socioeconomic conditions of early twentieth-century Beijing. In response, city officials and social reformers took actions to clean, police, and moralize the tenement and its inhabitants.

This chapter shifts focus from policymakers and law enforcement officials to the tenement inhabitants themselves, especially lower-class women who spent most, if not all, of their time at home, in and around their neighborhoods. Women emerged as a crucial force in defining the domestic rhythm and social characteristics of the tenements. Because rented rooms were very small, domestic dramas and private routines often developed beyond the four walls of one's living quarters and became integrated with the public milieu. In addition to being a place for women to perform domestic chores, the tenement neighborhood was a worksite that connected women's labor to larger market operations. Living in such close proximity to one another, women often interacted with female and male neighbors as they did with their family members. These interactions encouraged the development of new relationships, including friendship, courtship, sexual liaisons, and even prostitution. Many of them did not conform to state regulations regarding social behaviors and gender relationships, but they enabled a woman to form, extend, and maintain a flexible and dynamic web of relationships that became her social network. Ultimately, the neighborhood network met lower-class women's needs and helped them cope with economic and personal difficulties.

CHAPTER FOUR

Managing Serial Marriages

On February 9, 1944, thirty-seven-year-old rickshaw puller Wang Tingmao was just finishing a day's work and preparing to return home. Before he could walk into his room, his neighbors stopped him and told him that police officers had raided his home that afternoon and taken his wife, twenty-eight-year-old Guo Liu Shi, into custody. Upon hearing this shocking news, Wang Tingmao rushed to the nearby police precinct office, where he was informed of the two charges—adultery and bigamy—under which his wife was arrested. He also began to learn of her complicated marital history.[1]

In 1930, a matchmaker had introduced Guo Liu Shi to a man named Guo Dianpu. She married him in the same year and gave birth to a daughter shortly thereafter. It appears that they were getting along, but beneath their seemingly peaceful life, the couple was struggling to make ends meet. By 1942, Guo Liu Shi felt that she had suffered more than enough and decided that her husband would never be able to turn their dire situation around. She decided to leave home to find a job. Guo Dianpu opposed her plan, but Guo Liu Shi left anyway. She worked for a private household for about six months, from late 1942 to mid-1943, and then she returned home for a short period of time. When she decided to leave home again, Guo Dianpu was infuriated. Again he tried to stop her, but again he did not succeed. At first Guo Liu Shi stayed in a "female servant workshop" to wait for employment opportunities. She later ran into another woman surnamed Wu, who proposed to Guo Liu Shi that she leave behind her current marriage and find a new husband.

In March 1943, through Wu, Guo Liu Shi met rickshaw puller Wang Tingmao, who had just lost his wife a month before. Guo Liu Shi claimed that she was a widow and began to spend time with him. As they got closer, they began living together. In January 1944, Wang Tingmao

1. BPDFFY, J65-8-1751, Guo Liu Shi, 1944.

"hired a matchmaker" (*qing meiren* 請媒人) to carry out his marriage to Guo Liu Shi. On the day of the wedding, he "invited a score of guests" (*qingke* 請客), "made a feast" (*bai jiuxi* 擺酒席), and "worshipped heaven and earth" (*bai tiandi* 拜天地) with Guo Liu Shi.[2] It appears from the court testimonies that Wang Tingmao had not known anything about his new wife's twisted past until the police interrogation.

In the previous chapters, we studied the economic crises that strained domestic relationships and the neighborhood networks that helped women to get out of a difficult marriage; Guo Liu Shi's case in this chapter reveals the process through which a runaway woman obtained the status of a legal wife in a new relationship. Her experience allows us to look at what ritual steps constituted a legally binding marriage, how the performance of customary rites in the neighborhood context contributed to a fluid pattern of marriage, and how officials and laws judged the legality of customary nuptials. Finally, given the fact that twentieth-century China saw both social and institutional reforms that "forced the family to submit previously private activities to state scrutiny,"[3] this chapter explores how women moved from one marriage to another under the watchful eyes of the intervening state.

As the bigamy cases of Guo Liu Shi and others illustrate, in early twentieth-century Beijing, local people normally performed a series of customary rites, such as hiring matchmakers, delivering betrothal gifts, riding the sedan chair, holding wedding feasts, and worshipping heaven and earth, to establish a formal marital relationship. The popular ritual process conferred upon a woman the status of a wife. Yet the customary nuptials were widely criticized by social reformers and officials. Some argued that these rites immortalized ancestral worship, emphasized parental authority, and perpetuated the hierarchy between husband and wife, as well as that between wife and concubine, all of which had rendered marriage as a backward institution of domestic oppression. Others ridiculed customary rites, calling them a collection of "meaningless manners and foolish flummery" that consumed an enormous amount of resources in a society ravaged by poverty.[4] The regime change, war, and

2. The ritual involves the bride and bridegroom "making three obeisances together—the bridegroom on the left and the bride on the right—toward the front entrance." Chiu, *Marriage Laws and Customs of China*, p. 9.

3. Glosser, *Chinese Visions of Family and State,* p. 92.

4. Chao, *Autobiography of a Chinese Woman*, pp. 192–93.

Japanese occupation in the 1940s did not weaken the critics' influence. For example, the puppet government reiterated the critics' words in the "strengthen the public security campaigns" (*zhi'an qianghua yundong* 治安強化運動). By urging local residents to simplify ritual performances and reduce spending on life-cycle events, officials hoped to restore domestic economic strength and combat the rampant wartime shortages and inflation.[5] To some extent, Guo Liu Shi's wedding confirmed some of the reformers' concerns. When rickshaw puller Wang Tingmao married Guo Liu Shi in early 1943, he spent 400 *yuan* on betrothal gifts, feasts, and other services. That amount of money could have bought the couple more than 300 *jin* of wheat flour, which was enough food for 115 days. Such a disproportionate cost seems to reaffirm officials and critics' concerns about high wedding expenses very nearly draining local households' financial resources.

Reformist rhetoric could not explain why cash-strapped individuals and poverty-stricken families were willing to prepare just one day of celebration at the expense of a household's means of subsistence, which would take months, if not years, to recover after the wedding. Criminal cases, however, place women's choices and actions in individual frames of awareness and reveal the social function of customary nuptials in the process of women's serial marriages. It appears that the process to perform customary rites allowed both runaway women and the families they married into to access a range of paid services associated with the traditional nuptials. Women and men, especially those that did not have an extensive support network and that were married under pressured circumstances, relied on these service providers to plan and coordinate the nuptials. Moreover, the process created a venue to publicize the marriage before neighbors, friends, workmates, and acquaintances whose participation in and witness of the wedding process produced a legal and social validation of the new relationship. As women entered and terminated a relationship, as they juggled between formal marriages and temporary arrangements, the various stages of a woman's life—singlehood, marriage, and widowhood—became one fluid, messy, and continuous process. Women moved from one stage to the next according to changes in personal, emotional, and economic needs.

5. Beijingshi dang'anguan, *Riwei zai Beijing diqu de wuci qianghua zhi'an yundong*, pp. 527–37.

Governments in early twentieth-century China had closely examined the institution of marriage and family. The legal proceedings in 1940s Beijing District Court reveal several key changes in the marriage laws. For example, bigamy was a new category of criminal offense. For the first time in Chinese history, the civil code stipulated the conditions under which a legally binding marriage could be established. Moreover, municipal governments introduced an official certificate to endorse a marriage. Historians like Susan Glosser and Mechthild Leutner have argued that these reforms altered the balance between the state, the family, and the individual woman.[6] They "dissolved the barriers between family and state by appropriating to the state the authority previously held by the senior generation, pulling the family within the purview of the state, where it could be monitored by state agencies."[7] However, Guo Liu Shi's case shows that her wedding was neither a private celebration arranged by a family patriarch, nor a statist ceremony reaffirming an individual's tie to the political authority. The fluidity, and more precisely the messiness, of a marriage arrangement, as seen from runaway wives' cases, challenged the state's ability to define and monitor private life and domestic relationships.

The Wedding Scene

When in 1940 Zhou Enci, an undergraduate student from the Department of Sociology at Yenching University, conducted a survey on wedding customs in Beijing, she found that the standard format of local nuptials included at least seven steps:

1. Exchange the "note of family status" (*menghutie* 門戶帖): when both families tentatively agree upon the proposed marriage, the matchmaker requests the note of family status from the bride's family in exchange for the one from the groom's family. Both families leave that piece of document underneath the altar of the kitchen god (*zaowang ye* 灶王爺). If there are no incidents like bickering, breaking furniture, or sudden illness within the following three days, the proposed marriage will proceed.

6. Luo Meijun, *Beijing de shengyu, hunyin he sangzang.*
7. Glosser, *Chinese Visions of Family and State*, p. 83.

2. Exchange the "birthday card" (*xiaotie* 小帖): this document is also called the "eight-character card," which contains the birthday information of the bride and groom.
3. Draw up a "preliminary agreement" (*xiaoding* 小定): both families would inform their relatives and close friends of the upcoming marriage.
4. Deliver the "preliminary gifts" (*xiaoli* 小禮): the groom's family delivers several pieces of jewelry to the bride's family to confirm the marital agreement.
5. Deliver the "big gifts" (*dali* 大禮): about twenty days prior to the formal wedding day, the groom's family prepares and delivers clothes and jewelry that the bride would wear during the wedding ceremony. One day before wedding, the bride's family delivers a dowry to the groom's family.
6. Wedding: houses would be decorated with lanterns and colored hangings. The bride would be paraded in a sedan chair from her home to the groom's family home; they would then worship heaven and earth, exchange drinks, clarify the order of seniority, and pay respects to ancestors.
7. Post-wedding rituals: the bride pays a half-day visit to her natal family (*huimen* 回門). On the ninth and eighteenth day after the wedding, members of the natal family visit the bride.[8]

It would cost the couple and their extended families a considerable amount of time and money if they chose to follow the entire ritual sequence. In reality, only the local wealthy class could afford to do so. Most families instead combined or even skipped some preliminary steps and concentrated their limited resources on the crucial step of the celebration, the wedding ceremony itself.[9] Nuptials, as Zhou Enci described, were more of a general guideline than a strict ritual regimen. People were open to modifying them to serve their own needs. The bigamy cases described below reveal the miscellany of weddings in 1940s Beijing.

Wang Shuhua lived with her husband, forty-five-year-old Jiang Songquan, who was a retired health administrator at Puren Hospital in the Outer-3 District in Beijing. One day in early 1942, Wang Shuhua was doing laundry at home. While washing her husband's sweater,

8. Zhou Enci, "Beiping hunyin lisu," pp. 28–41.
9. Chen Guyuan, *Zhongguo hunyinshi*, pp. 104–7.

she found a residence card in the pocket. The card was clearly her husband's, as it had his picture affixed to it; but the home address listed on the card was in the Inner-5 District, a place Wang Shuhua knew nothing about. Out of curiosity, she went there on her own. When she pushed the door open, she found her husband and, to her surprise, another woman standing behind him who also called him husband. In a rage, Wang Shuhua brought the case to the Beijing District Court. On January 30, 1942, the prosecutor pressed a bigamy charge against Jiang Songquan.[10]

During the court investigation, Jiang Songquan testified that he married Wang Shuhua in 1939, and on their wedding day, he hired a wedding sedan chair to bring Wang Shuhua to his home for the ceremony. According to Zhou Enci's study, the groom's family could send up to three sedan chairs: a red, large, and richly decorated sedan chair for the bride to ride in and two smaller green ones for two female escorts representing the bride's family (*songqin taitai* 送親太太) and the groom's family (*quqin taitai* 娶親太太).[11] The local custom also required the bride to arrive at the wedding ceremony before eleven o'clock in the morning. She should wear a red padded garment and a silk veil and enter the sedan chair in the courtyard of her natal family's home in the presence of her parents and other family members (see fig. 10). A procession of gong beaters, drumbeaters, and musicians led the way to the groom's home. A group of bearers clad in green outfits and black caps carried "many elaborately-carved and gilded wooden pavilions" containing "sweetmeats, ornaments, a wild goose and gander, and the figure of a dolphin, emblematic of rank and wealth," "red boards with the titles of the ancestors of the bride and bridegroom carved in letters of gold," and "large carved and gilded lanterns, each containing a red candle."[12] The sedan chair carried by professional bearers came last in the procession. Families of modest means could cut costs by preparing just one plain red sedan chair or reducing the number of bearers and musicians.

Despite the popularity of the traditional pomp and circumstance highlighting the sedan chair and the service team carrying traditional

10. BPDFFY, J65-6-217, Jiang Songquan, 1942.
11. Zhou Enci, "Beiping hunyin lisu," p. 36.
12. Werner, *China of the Chinese*, p. 49.

Figure 10. “Wedding Procession with Sedan Chair in Courtyard.” Hedda Morrison, photographer. Courtesy of Hedda Morrison Photographs of China, Harvard-Yenching Library (HM05.2076).

decorative items, some local families adopted a few foreign practices in the celebration. When thirty-three-year-old Zhang Qingwu, an herbal doctor, married Li Shuzhen in November 1942, he gave two rings (one gold and one silver) and 100 *yuan* in cash to Li Shuzhen's family for the marriage proposal. Then, six days before the wedding ceremony, he gave Li Shuzhen's family another 110 *yuan*, out of which 20 *yuan* was for her younger brother to make clothes and 90 *yuan* was for her family to entertain their guests. On the wedding day, Zhang Qingwu hired a Western brass band and a wedding carriage to carry Li Shuzhen to the feast.[13] As described in both foreign accounts and Chinese local history, the wedding carriage featured a glass-paneled compartment in the shape of a traditional sedan chair.[14]

The local customs required a different kind of wedding procession if a man were to marry a widow. Twenty-one-year-old Zhang Li Shi ran away from her husband, twenty-year-old peasant Jia Yongliang, on the third day of the third lunar month in 1941. After hiding in her uncle's home for about a month, Zhang Li Shi married twenty-one-year-old rickshaw puller Zhang Dianyuan. Since Zhang Li Shi claimed that she was a widow, Zhang Dianyuan organized the procession differently. Unlike other first-time brides who entered the sedan chair inside their own courtyard, Zhang Li Shi entered her ragged sedan chair in an open field away from residential buildings. Zhang Dianyuan did hire a band of drumbeaters and musicians, but they were not sent out until the evening.[15] According to Zhou Enci's interview of an elderly Beijing woman in 1940, in some extreme cases, a remarried widow could be escorted to her new home as late as nearly midnight.[16] The wedding procession could even be further simplified by replacing the bridal sedan chair with a rickshaw or a horse-drawn cart.

The next step after the procession was the wedding feast. In the cases of Jiang Songquan and Zhang Qingwu, both men chose to entertain their guests in restaurants—the former at Fu Shou Tang 福壽堂 and the latter at Hui Xian Tang 會賢堂. The *tang* 堂 character in a restaurant's name indicated that it offered upscale service and specialized in "cere-

13. BPDFFY, J65-6-4788, Zhang Qingwu, 1942.
14. Werner, *China of the Chinese*, p. 165; Chang Renchun, *Lao Beijing de fengsu*, p. 49.
15. BPDFFY, J65-6-565, Zhang Li Shi and Cui Kun, 1942.
16. Zhou Enci, "Beiping hunyin lisu," p. 125.

monious banquets associated with weddings, birthdays, and bereavements."[17] Most *tang* restaurants were located in commercial districts to offer customers easy access. The kitchen and cashier's stand were placed on both sides of the entrance facing each other, which allowed "the cashier and his retinue" to greet guests; the chef could also use the "ever-fragrant dishes in preparation to impress the potential customers with something more substantial than obsequious salutations."[18] The entrance led to a spacious courtyard with separate dining rooms on all four sides. Each room was furnished with expensive hardwood furniture and decorated with beautiful artwork on the walls. Some restaurants would even install a mini-stage for Peking Opera performances upon patrons' request.[19] As to the feast, the restaurants had a number of set menus to suit different budgets. The common set of dishes included cold dishes, eight main courses, gourmet soup, and fruit and sweets, each of which carried a celebratory meaning.[20] Although we do not know exactly what dishes Jiang Songquan and Zhang Qingwu ordered in their respective weddings, an advertisement of another similar Shandong cuisine *tang* restaurant provides some clues (see table 4.1).

Many families in Beijing chose to save money by holding the ceremony at home. In such cases, the house would be decorated with red lanterns and colored hangings to create a celebratory atmosphere. The groom's family could hire builders to erect "a pavilion of reed mats, or cloth . . . temporarily over the courtyard" and rent tables and chairs. To prepare food for guests, the groom's family either asked relatives and close friends for help, or hired a team of itinerant chefs known in the local slang as *kouzi* 口子 (which literally means "mouth"). The team consisted of an experienced chef and his assistants. The head of the team would spend time in teahouses waiting for invited patrons, negotiating service charges, and setting the menu for the feast.[21] There would be a number of customized feast menus of varied costs available for individuals to choose from, according to their own taste and

17. Fei-shi, *Guide to Peking*, pp. 99–100; Yin Runsheng, "Jiefangqian Beijing de fanzhuang fanguan," p. 212.
18. Fei-shi, *Guide to Peking*, p. 99.
19. Yin Runsheng, "Jiefangqian Beijing de fanzhuang fanguan," p. 203.
20. Ibid., p. 55.
21. Swallow, *Sidelights on Peking Life*, p. 56.

Table 4.1
Wedding Feast Menu of Feng Ze Yuan Restaurant 丰澤園

Birds-Nest Soup 一品官燕
Shark's Fins Sauté 紅燒魚翅
White Fungus Soup 清湯銀耳
Pigeon Eggs Sauté 紅燒鴿蛋
Fried Chicken 西法雞
Fried Sweet & Sour Fish 脆皮活魚
Braised Abalone with Asparagus 龍須扒鮑魚
Steamed Cabbage 乾蒸菜心
Roast Duck 叉燒肥鴨
Sauted Tomatoes with Shrimp 西紅柿蝦仁
"Hsu Li Hung" and Bamboo Shoots 乾燒冬筍
Mushrooms with Peas 清炒芫豆
Duck Kidneys 清燴鴨腰
Chicken and Mushroom Soup 原湯冬菇
Fried Duck Livers 清炸鴨肝
Walnut Tea 核桃茶
Shrimp and Cabbage Soup 海米蒸菜墩
Sea Slugs Sauté 紅燒海參
Shark's Lips 砂鍋燒魚唇

Source: Guide to Peking, revised edition. *Peiping Chronicle*, 1935, p. 104.

budget.[22] The team would then visit the location of the feast a day before the ceremony and build a makeshift kitchen to prepare the meal on the following day.[23]

Some couples worshipped heaven and earth together in front of all of the guests in the last stage of the wedding ceremony. In Zhang Qingwu's case, he adopted the new rite, and he and Li Shuzhen bowed to each other. Before ending the celebration, the couple took pictures together with thirty guests Zhang Qingwu had invited. It might have surprised these guests that the marriage fell apart less than a month after the wedding. Li Shuzhen and her father discovered that Zhang Qingwu was eleven years older than he had previously claimed. Besides lying about his age, he already had one wife and two concubines at the time he married Li Shuzhen. Worst of all, Li Shuzhen suspected that Zhang Qingwu did not like her and was planning to abandon her. Li

22. Gamble, *How Chinese Families Live in Peiping*, p. 206.
23. Aisin Gioro, *Jingcheng jiusu*, p. 157; Chang Renchun, *Hongbai xishi*, pp. 124–30.

Shuzhen's father filed a bigamy charge against Zhang Qingwu, and the ensuing court investigation brings to light the hodge-podge details of his wedding ceremony.

The basic ritual format and the rites performed in many weddings are known as the Six Rites (*liuli* 六禮) and are referenced in the *Book of Rites*. The classic ritual book describes the ritual set as one of the key family rites, equal in importance to those observed for other important life-cycle events such as the birth of a child, the capping of an adolescent to signify the beginning of his adulthood, the funeral of a family member, and ancestral sacrifice.[24] Despite the decline of the imperial political institutions, the old rites remained popular among many social groups. But since the late nineteenth century, some Chinese began to search for alternative ritual models. They found inspiration in the Western church wedding and introduced it to the Chinese public after removing the religious symbols. Their efforts gave rise to a new fashion that became known as the "civilized wedding" (*wenming jiehun* 文明結婚). This type of ceremony featured new elements such as the brass band, cars, the wedding carriage, and photography, and it was often held in public venues such as restaurants, parks, and auditoriums (see figs. 11 and 12).[25] As Jiang Songquan's and Zhang Qingwu's cases demonstrate, wedding ceremonies in 1940s Beijing combined old rites with new practices, and Chinese customs with foreign elements.[26]

24. Mai Huiting, *Zhongguo jiating gaizao wenti*, pp. 194–96; Chang Renchun, *Lao Beijing de fengsu*, pp. 143–64.

25. Chinese learned of Western wedding ceremonies through their growing frequent contact with foreign communities, particularly in treaty ports. According to Zuo Yuhe's study, the earliest Chinese record of a church wedding is found in the famous late Qing reformer Wang Tao's (1828–97) diary. It was dated around 1859 and detailed the marriage of a foreign couple residing in Shanghai. The ceremony took place in the home of a prominent American missionary named Elijah Coleman Bridgman (1801–61), and Wang was among the guests. The church rituals indeed surprised Wang, and he wrote in his diary: "The wedding ceremony was attended by a significant number of foreigners. Bridgman's wife plays piano and sings cadence and hymns. The formalities are: Priest in full attire stands facing north, and in front of him is a table with marriage documents on it. The bridegroom and bride stand facing south. After the priest reads through the marriage agreement and asks a few questions, the newlyweds bow to each other, which ends all wedding rituals." Zuo, "Cong 'wenming jiehun' dao 'jituan jiehun,'" p. 198.

26. For the procedures of the civilized wedding, see Chiu, *Marriage Laws and Customs of China*, pp. 11–13; Zuo, "Cong 'wenming jiehun' dao 'jituan jiehun'"; Finnane, "Changing Spaces and Civilized Weddings."

Figure 11. "Wedding Carriage." Sidney D. Gamble, photographer. Courtesy of Sidney D. Gamble Photographs, Archive of Documentary Arts, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University (485A_2797).

Figure 12. "Wedding Band." Sidney D. Gamble, photographer. Courtesy of Sidney D. Gamble Photographs, Archive of Documentary Arts, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University (485A_2796).

"A Heavy Drain on Family Resources"

Testimonies from bigamy trials at the Beijing District Court provide insight into not only the ritual process that the parties to the marriage went through but also the financial aspects of the marriage. The wedding was a significant expense for the entire household. In the herbal doctor Zhang Qingwu's case, he paid 210 *yuan* for his marriage, which was enough to feed a three-person family for a month.[27] The significant cost of a wedding explains why plaintiffs and defendants often brought money matters to court. They hoped that the court would help them recover their losses from a broken marriage, both the emotional loss of a spouse's companionship and the financial loss of their investment in the relationship.

Three major expenses—cash payments to matchmakers, gifts to the bride's family, and the wedding ceremony itself—made the wedding a costly event. The previous chapters have shown that matchmakers put a lot of legwork into negotiating between parties in a marital arrangement. Additionally, local customs required two types of gifts from the groom's family to the bride's family: the "preliminary gift," which was normally a few pieces of jewelry, to confirm the marriage agreement, and the "big gift"—food and clothes placed in four big wooden containers sent to the bride's home about twenty days before the wedding day. The costs involved varied according to the number and quality of gifts and, naturally, according to the families' socioeconomic status. According to Zhou Enci's study, a silver wedding ring cost 0.5–0.6 *yuan*, a silver ring covered with gold 0.8–0.9 *yuan*, a pair of golden earrings 1 *yuan*, tea and snacks 4–5 *yuan*, a marriage contract 3 *yuan*, two geese 5 *yuan*, twenty *jin* of wine 10 *yuan*, clothes 40–50 *yuan*, other jewelry 10 *yuan*, and food in the food container 20 *yuan*. For the wedding procession, a decent bridal sedan chair with four carriers cost 30 *yuan*; and a team of twenty drumbeaters and twenty bearers cost 60 *yuan*.[28] In addition, the banquet alone could amount to something in the range of 44–82 percent of the total wedding cost.[29]

27. BPSSHJ, J2-7-696, "Linian mianfen jiagebiao" [The yearly price record of wheat flour], 1937–45.
28. Zhou Enci, "Beiping hunyin lisu," p. 88.
29. Gamble, *How Chinese Families Live in Peiping*, pp. 203–7.

"The wedding expenses ranged from 1.5 to 9 times the average monthly income," Sidney Gamble concluded. About half of the families he researched spent 4.0–4.5 months' worth of their total family income on a wedding. It was common for families to "go into debt to secure the necessary funds," and Gamble's assessment was that "repaying debts out of family surplus is likely to be a long process."[30] Although they did not think wedding expenses were the sole reason for families' economic hardship, Gamble and his Chinese colleagues did see weddings as a prominent example of how outdated social customs could mislead people into spending their limited resources unwisely, thus sending them into poverty.

Researchers, reformers, and officials in China during this period criticized the extravagant expense of the wedding. Sociologists blamed the wedding, along with other life-cycle events, for imposing "a heavy drain on family resources."[31] Although the research was focused primarily on an "individual family's financial strategy" (*jiaji* 家計), the results also provided a "scientific" and an empirical base from which to analyze this social problem and created a way for the government to tackle larger issues such as "national economic prospects" (*guoji* 國計) and "the people's livelihood" (*minsheng* 民生). Social reformers and political leaders envisioned that by persuading people to keep a surplus family budget and, especially, to reduce spending on life-cycle events, the material well-being of the family and the economic prospects of the nation could be protected.

The GMD regime in the 1930s tried to tackle the problem of excessive wedding expenditures by instituting multiple reforms. In January 1933, the Department of People's Mobilization of the Nationalist Party passed a resolution demanding officials put an end to wasteful practices on the occasions of weddings, funerals, and birthdays. Officials were encouraged to replace the lavish multi-course wedding feast with a modest tea party that served guests with snacks and fruits. If a banquet was necessary, the cost was not supposed to exceed twelve *yuan* unless the wedding was a diplomatic event. Finally, to prevent officials from taking advantage of personal celebrations to solicit bribes, the resolution restricted officials from sending invitations to people other than

30. Ibid., pp. 198–202.
31. Ibid., p. 198.

their family members.[32] Such a vision affected the wartime economic policy under the Japanese occupation. By the 1940s, plans for wedding reforms were included in the collaborationist regime's social campaigns and political propaganda. Officials hoped that the resources saved from these social events and celebrations would help support war efforts.

The term "people's livelihood" still retained its political currency. Officials in the 1940s followed their Nationalist counterparts' rhetoric by advertising their drastic wartime economic policies and social reforms as effective means to "secure people's livelihood" (*anding minsheng* 安定民生) and to "enrich people's livelihoods" (*yiyu minsheng* 以裕民生). For example, in late 1941, the puppet government launched a movement calling on Chinese residents to "adopt diligent and frugal lifestyles" (*qinjian yundong* 勤儉運動).[33] One of the goals was to simplify funeral rituals and abolish unnecessary social gatherings on wedding occasions. In early 1942, the Municipal Government released six propaganda slogans and posted them in public spaces. One of them read, "[The campaign] determines to eliminate evil customs such as performing meaningless flummery and holding unnecessary gatherings at the times of wedding and funerary; [people] are committed to living a simple life and ending the waste of [resources]."[34] In another campaign in October, the Municipal Government issued a set of ten guidelines aiming to simplify wedding and funeral rites. The guidelines admonished people not to hire sedan carriers, drummers, and musicians; not to send silk banners as gifts; not to make invitation letters on large-sized or expensive paper; not to transfer gifts (*guoli* 過禮) between families of

32. Guomindang zhongyang minzhong xunlianbu (Department of people's mobilization of the Nationalist Party), "Gechu gongwu renyuan hunsang shouyan langfei zanxing guicheng" (Provisional regulations on eradicating wasteful practices among officials on the occasions of weddings, funerals, and birthdays), January 1933. From Zhongguo dier lishi dang'anguan, *Zhonghua minguo shi dang'an ziliao huibian*, p. 440.
33. "Beijing tebieshi ji sijiao zhi disici zhi'an qianghua yundong shishi yaoling" (The key points of the fourth campaign on strengthening public security in Beijing and its suburbs), 1942. From Beijingshi dang'anguan, *Riwei zai Beijing diqu de wuci qianghua zhi'an yundong*, p. 349.
34. "Shigongshu ling fa Xinminhui shizonghui diwuci zhi'an qianghua yundong shishi jihua" [The Municipal Government's directive to the Association of New People on the implementing plan of the fifth campaign of strengthening public security], October 12, 1942. Beijingshi dang'anguan, *Riwei Beijing xinminhui*, p. 251.

the marriage; and not to make monetary contributions (*cou fenzi* 湊份子) to the celebration.[35]

Reform campaigns did not succeed in abolishing customary rites; they did, however, produce a discourse that defined wedding ceremonies and expenses as a matter of public welfare, and an issue of political economy, thus justifying instruction by the government. Although they appeared problematic for many political, social, and economic reasons, traditional nuptials remained popular and even desirable among ordinary individuals and households in Beijing. In the next part of this chapter, I aim to examine these "irrational choices" as a part of women's and men's survival tactics and to study how people benefitted from the costly nuptial arrangements despite reformist criticisms to the contrary.

Marriage in Flux

In his examination of public health reforms in the early twentieth century in Beijing's neighborhoods, historian Yang Nianqun argues that life-cycle events, such as birth and death, were not just natural events but also traumatic episodes, putting an immense emotional and psychological pressure on individual households and neighborhoods: "Every cry that women made in pain during the labor, every breath the newborn took, and every step the body of the deceased was moved" disrupted a family's daily routine and the existing cosmological peace of the community. Ritual performances and services by people like midwives (*chanpo* 產婆) and unofficial coroners (*yinyang sheng* 陰陽生) were required and appreciated, as they helped individual families and the community cope with psychological pressure, restore domestic peace, and rebuild communal harmony.[36] To borrow Yang's argument, marriage was an intense process during which a woman was finding her place in a new family and the newly wedded couple was settling in the community. For women who had just run away from a broken marriage or who had attempted to remarry without her natal family's support or

35. Ibid.
36. Yang Nianqun, "Minguo chunian Beijing de shengsi kongzhi yu kongjian zhuanhuan," p. 133.

presence, this process could be even more stressful. As the following bigamy case illustrates, customary nuptials not only helped restore the figurative cosmic balance of a family and a community, they also helped a woman secure her status as a wife and settle into a stable marital relationship. Most importantly, they publicly declared and thereby affirmed her standing in the community.

When she stood trial for bigamy at the Beijing District Court in February 1942, Ying Wang Shi, a thirty-nine-year-old Sichuan native, had put her widowhood and three twisted marital relationships behind her.[37] The first was with a battalion commander named Xia Deqin. They were married in 1922 and lived together for about ten years, until Xia's death. Ying Wang Shi remained a widow in the following eight years. But as time went by, the growing pain of loneliness and her diminished livelihood made widowhood increasingly hard to sustain. In September 1940, she made the decision to find a new husband. She received help from Shi Ran Shi, whom Ying Wang Shi called her "adopted mother." Shi Ran Shi ran a food stall in an open market and knew a thirty-six-year-old carpenter named Li Shucai, who was one of her customers. Shi Ran Shi introduced Ying Wang Shi to Li Shucai, and they were married on September 15, 1940. On the wedding day, Li Shucai rented a sedan chair to bring Ying Wang Shi to his home. He also invited the three matchmakers, Shi Ran Shi and his two neighbors, to the wedding feast. Amid their guests' congratulations, the couple worshipped heaven and earth to complete the ceremony.

Their peaceful life did not last long, however; Ying Wang Shi became anxious again. She realized that marrying Li Shucai was not a financially solvent choice at all. The escalating wartime inflation ate up his meager income and left the couple struggling to make ends meet. When the food crisis hit the city at the end of 1941, the prices of staple foods rose 30 percent within a few weeks.[38] The situation drove Ying Wang

37. BPDFFY, J65-6-599, Ying Wang Shi, 1942. The official investigation transcript found that Ying Wang Shi had been Li Ning Shi when she cohabited with Li Shucai, and she then became Wang Ning Shi after she married Wang Dianzhu (her husband surname's was Wang and her maiden name was Ning). But, for some unexplained reason, the official indictment and sentence still wrote her name as Ying Wang Shi.

38. BPSSHJ, J2-7-696, "Linian mianfen jiagebiao" [The year-by-year price record of wheat flour], 1937–45.

Shi to the breaking point; she refused to slip back into poverty and was determined to save herself the same way she did two years ago, that is, to find a new husband. With help from neighbors and their friends, she ran away from Li Shucai on December 19 and married Wang Dianzhu, a twenty-one-year-old bowl mender, three days later.

It is not clear whether Wang Dianzhu was skeptical about Ying Wang Shi's background before he married her. It would have been reasonable for him to be doubtful. She had not told him where she came from, where the members of her natal family lived, or what and how many marriages she had been through in the past. Not a single member from her natal family came to meet Wang Dianzhu during the process of negotiating the marriage. These facts all indicate that she had a complicated background. But Ying Wang Shi insisted that "she didn't have a husband" (*meiyou nanren* 沒有男人), and the matchmakers also reassured Wang Dianzhu that she was who she claimed to be. It is unclear how much he had trusted them. Only one of the matchmakers, a fifty-seven-year-old paper collector named Tian Zhiyuan, was his friend. The other two matchmakers, Li Tian Shi and Liu Zhi, only knew Tian Zhiyuan and not Wang Dianzhu.

Wang Dianzhu could have chosen to simply ignore Ying Wang Shi's "unclear" background. But he needed to figure out a way to properly introduce his wife to his relatives, friends, and neighbors; to dispel their suspicions; to present themselves in public as a married couple, and ultimately to start a normal family life in the neighborhood. He, like many other men who married runaway women, found the customary nuptials extremely useful. Because matchmakers had told Wang Dianzhu that Ying Wang Shi was widowed, he followed the customs by sending a rickshaw, not a sedan chair, to bring her to the ceremony. The wedding feast was held at Wang Dianzhu's home and lasted for two days; all in all, more than thirty people attended their wedding. The series of ritual formalities made the wedding an expensive event. Wang Dianzhu said the marriage cost him 200 *yuan*, which could cover three months' worth of salary for a worker like the court clerk who recorded his testimony during the investigation, or which could purchase 345 *jin* of the first-grade machine-milled wheat flour on the market.[39]

39. BPDFFY, J65-3-177, "Beiping difang fayuan jianchachu zhiyuan gongzibiao" [Salary checklist of employees of the Beijing District Court], 1942; BPSSHJ, J2-7-696, "Linian mianfen jiagebiao" [The yearly price record of wheat flour], 1937–45.

If Wang Dianzhu and Ying Wang Shi had been hoping to use the customary nuptials to hide her past and announce the new relationship to their friends and neighbors, they clearly had succeeded. When the court questioned people about the nature of the relationship between Wang Dianzhu and Ying Wang Shi—whether it was an extramarital relationship, cohabitation, or a legal marriage—they all responded that it was a legally binding marriage based on the wedding procession they witnessed and the wedding feast they attended. The observance of the costly rituals safeguarded Ying Wang Shi's status as Wang Dianzhu's wife in his neighborhood community. Had her second husband Li Shucai not found her, she might have been able to live quietly and peacefully as Wang Dianzhu's wife.

Her wish was shattered, however. On December 31, 1941, just thirteen days after her desertion, and ten days into her new marriage, Ying Wang Shi's whereabouts were discovered by Li Shucai. To add to her humiliation, a group of police officers showed up with Li Shucai and arrested her immediately. On March 9, 1942, Ying Wang Shi was sentenced to three months in prison followed by three years of probation. Upon hearing the sentence and learning that he would lose his wife's companionship, Wang Dianzhu had only one request: "It is fine [if] Ying Wang Shi isn't able to stay with me, but she needs to refund all my spending [on the wedding]."[40] His sense of loss was obvious, but his costly wedding ceremony was not, as reformist rhetoric described, a senseless gesture that did nothing but damage public welfare. The ceremony was a set of practices through which women, and especially runaway women in many cases, could be introduced into a new marriage and accepted as a participant in normal neighborhood life.

Between Law and Custom

Social reformers had been attacking the traditional wedding ceremony for decades, but they were not able to reach a consensus as to what a better option would be. For example, in 1930 sociologist Lou Zhaokui

40. BPDFFY, J65-6-599, Ying Wang Shi, 1942.

once asked 183 college students in Beijing in 1930 about their views on marriage and the family. He found that 22.2 percent were willing to follow the new style wedding ceremony, 38.9 percent agreed to simplify the formalities, 10.1 percent hoped to "invent a new model" (*zichuang yishi* 自創一式), and 12.1 percent were in favor of abolishing the ceremony.[41] Although his work only covered a fraction of the college student community, it suggested that the format of the wedding ceremony was primarily a personal choice. There was no official format, either, and each regime change brought new guidelines and prescriptions. When the GMD authority joined the marriage reform movement and pressed for radical change in the 1930s, it proposed that nuptials should include some state-centered rites; for example, every person in attendance should bow three times, once to the Nationalist Party flag, once to the national flag, and once to the portrait of Prime Minister Sun Yat-sen.[42] The collaborator officials in Japanese-occupied Beijing abolished these GMD symbols and choreography in the 1940s to avoid offending their Japanese occupiers. They also toned down the attack on traditional rituals. Through it all, it was the people who ultimately chose their own menu of nuptials to fit their budgets, cultural preferences, and ideological pursuits. Indeed, by the early twentieth century, customary nuptials had developed into a complex ritual sequence combining old rites with new practices. When marital disputes arose and cases were brought to court, it became a challenging task for lawmakers and judges to evaluate the legality of a hodge-podge of different nuptials and define the conditions that established a legally binding marriage.

The criminal and civil codes enforced in Beijing District Court in the 1940s came out of a decades-long legislative process, which was frequently interrupted by political reforms and regime changes. The process was also further complicated by ideological struggles between radicalism and conservatism and between Chinese tradition and imported concepts. Since 1904, three different governments had separately prepared four drafts. The GMD government finally promulgated the Civil Code between 1930 and 1931 and the Criminal Code in 1935. The Sino-Japanese war from 1937 to 1945 shook the Chinese justice system, but neither Japanese military authorities nor the Chinese collaborationist government was inter-

41. Lou, "Hunyin diaocha," pp. 79–80.
42. Glosser, *Chinese Visions of Family and State*, p. 87.

ested in introducing new legislation. As a result, the GMD laws remained in force in Mainland China until 1949. The lawmakers under various regimes all sought to reconfigure private relationships in relation to state authority by means of these legislative efforts.

To begin with, the imperial law states that "young people will be engaged and married according to the rites."[43] As brief and vague as it was, the imperial law did not explain specifically what those rites were. It seems that from the code, sub-statutes, and county magistrate manual books, several key factors needed to be met before a relationship could be considered as a marriage and a woman could be conferred the status of a wife: the first two criteria were documentation and parental consent—as the law put, "If [the head of the bride's family] who has agreed to the marriage of the daughter has already signed the marriage contract, or if there is a private agreement, and he changes his mind, (the member of the woman's family who is in charge of the marriage decision) will receive 50 strokes of the light bamboo."[44] The last criterion was the betrothal gift. The law stipulated, "Even though there is no marriage contract, when engagement presents have already been received, this is also the case."[45] Jonathan Ocko notices a similar judicial practice in a Board of Punishment opinion: "The ritual presentation of the bride to the groom's ancestors and consummation of the marriage gave it a definitively formal status," he writes, "but an affirmation of betrothal with an exchange of gifts may have established married status according to custom."[46] The imperial law took into account people's choices of the rites to perform; it was never a requirement to complete the entire ritual sequence before a marriage could be validated.

Legislative reformers in the early twentieth century began to re-define the conditions that constituted a legally binding marriage. The first-draft civil code in twentieth-century China was a compendium of provisions of civil issues taken from the original *Great Qing Code*. As lawmakers in the late Qing began to follow the Western standard to promulgate an independent criminal law, they incorporated all the provisions on inheritance, marriage, debt, and property into

43. Jones, *The Great Qing Code*, p. 123.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid.
46. Ocko, "Hierarchy and Harmony," p. 219.

a new body of civil law,[47] but this was only a temporary fix to serve immediate adjudication. A long-term solution was underway, and the lawmakers completed a new civil law—the *Draft of the Civil Code of the Great Qing* (*Da Qing minlü caoan* 大清民律草案)—in 1911. But several months later, the Republican revolution brought the dynasty down and abolished the code.[48] The warlord government prepared another draft between 1925 and 1926. Then, even before it unified China, the GMD authority launched its legislative reform. Unlike the previous imperial model that defined marital status based upon the performance of certain ritual formalities, however, the draft civil codes defined marital status as the completion of registration with the civil offices. For example, the late Qing draft stipulates that "[a] marriage will become valid after it is reported (*chengbao* 呈報) to the household registration official (*huji li* 戶籍吏)."[49] In the following two drafts prepared by the warlord government in Beijing and the GMD government respectively, the requirement of registering a marriage with a government agency remained. These new drafts stressed that completing a series of ceremonies (e.g., Six Rites) without official registration would *no longer* constitute a legally binding marriage.

If the new model had been enforced, the government would have taken direct control of the institution of marriage, which was previously managed by the family and defined by customary rites. However, the civil code that was in effect in 1940s Beijing did not institute the registration requirement. Marriage could now be established after wedding formalities were completed in public. Ironically, the new civil code actually revoked all previous reform efforts and readopted the conditions stipulated in the imperial marriage law, only with a slight difference in wording, i.e., the performance of the Six Rites was reworded as "celebrated by open ceremony and in the presence of two or more witnesses."[50] The legal wording for "open ceremony" does not focus on which specific rituals people had to perform on their wedding day; instead, it was more concerned with whether the rituals performed

47. Philip Huang, *Code, Custom, and Legal Practice in China*, p. 17.
48. Yang Lixin, *Da Qing minlü cao'an*.
49. Art. 1335, No. 1: Conditions of a Marriage, Chap. 3: Marriage, Unit 4: Relatives. *Daqing minlü cao'an* [*Draft Civil Code of the Great Qing*], 1911. From Yang Lixin, *Da Qing minlü cao'an*, p. 171.
50. *The Civil Code of the Republic of China*, Art. 982, Chap. 2: Marriage, p. 8.

were open enough to make the ceremony a public event. The following case provides an example of how loosely judicial officials defined an open ceremony and illustrates how the new law was interpreted in adjudication.

Li Yuxiang was sixteen years old in 1943. In September, through twenty-year-old apprentice Wei Dengcun, she became acquainted with his sworn brother Ding Yuxi, who was thirty-six years old and owned a store selling ivory carvings in the commercial district near Qianmen. On October 25, 1943, Li Yuxiang married Ding Yuxi. It seems that the new couple was on good terms for about half a year, until they separated in April of 1944. Li Yuxiang went back to her father and complained that she was sleeping less than four hours each night because she had to do housework and serve her husband while he smoked opium. She also said that her husband had married her without divorcing his first wife. Thus, on April 10, 1944, Li Yuxiang's father accused Ding Yuxi of bigamy in Beijing District Court. During the court hearing, Ding Yuxi admitted to his first marriage, but he argued that he had taken Li Yuxiang not as a wife but as a concubine. The case became more complicated when Li Yuxiang could not provide an official document certifying her marriage with Ding Yuxi. In the one-month-long court hearings that ensued, judicial officials focused on the nitty-gritty details of the rites performed on their wedding day in order to determine the nature of the couple's relationship.[51]

The first step of the court's investigation was to determine if a ceremony of any kind was ever held. Li Yuxiang stated that on the day of her wedding, she boarded a sedan chair in front of Donghongtai Hotel and rode several kilometers to Tianshun Hotel, where the wedding feast was scheduled to be held. The defendants, Ding Yuxi and his matchmaker apprentice Wei Dengcun, both admitted that what Li Yuxiang described had happened. But the ceremony in question had yet to be investigated further before it could be determined as an "open" ceremony, with "openness" evaluated vis-à-vis the condition that "people other than the two witnesses and the invited guests could see such ceremonies performed." In order to clarify the meaning of the "open ceremony," one court ruling states that:

51. BPDFFY, J65-13-1202, Ding Yuxi, 1944.

> If the door was closed or if the room was situated in a place where nobody except those inside the room could see what was going on, the marriage would not be valid for the simple reason that it was not openly held.[52]

There was a big dispute regarding the openness of the ceremony at the trial. While matchmaker Wei Dengcun insisted that the wedding had been a low-profile event without the attendance of any relatives or family friends, Li Yuxiang claimed that the rite of worshipping heaven and earth was performed in the presence of other people. Testimonies from several people confirmed that the ceremony was an open one attended by Li Yuxiang's parents, her brother and her sister-in-law, Ding Yuxi's mother and his first wife, their matchmaker, and even the manager of Tianshun Hotel.

Even though it had been confirmed that an open ceremony was held, the collected evidence was insufficient to convict Ding Yuxi, because judicial officials still had to prove that the "open ceremony" in question was indeed a wedding ceremony. As one court ruling stressed:

> If the circumstances were such that no reasonable man would think that a formal marriage had taken place, it cannot be said that open ceremonies had been performed even though the banquet was held in a public dining room where people other than the invited guests could see what was going on and even though it was understood by the invited guests that it was a banquet given on the occasion of a marriage. In other words, a banquet held openly with an ostensible objective of uniting two persons in marriage but without the actual performance of marriage ceremonies does not constitute a valid marriage.[53]

A number of important testimonies were obtained from Li Yuxiang's father, Ding Yuxi's first wife, and the manager of Tianshun Hotel. The first two people confirmed the performance of "worshipping heaven and earth" by the newlyweds, and the last witness remarked on the use of a sedan chair. In the end, judicial officials were able to convict Ding Yuxi on charges of bigamy, and they sentenced him to three months in prison.

52. Fu and Zhou, *Zhonghuaminguo liufa liyou panjie huibian*, p. 1008; Chiu, *Marriage Laws and Customs of China*, p. 129.
53. Chiu, *Marriage Laws and Customs of China*, p. 129.

In investigating bigamy cases, judicial officials regarded the word "public" as meaning "people other than the parties to the marriage." The "public" in legal proceedings was an open and fluid definition, and it varied from case to case. Judicial officials painstakingly examined a range of evidence, including photos taken during the wedding ceremony, the list of guests attending the wedding banquet, and the reservation receipt from the restaurant where the wedding banquet was given, in order to determine whether the wedding was "publicly" held. The law enforced in 1940s Beijing therefore focused less upon which specific rituals people performed than on whether the wedding ceremony was a public event witnessed by people other than the parties to a marriage. Vermier Y. Chiu, a contemporary GMD judicial official, points out that the "open ceremony" was an ambiguous term, which left room for "the parties to the marriage to choose whichever form or procedure that [suited] them . . . [they] may be married, for instance, according to the Christian (Protestant or Catholic) rites, the Buddhist rites, the Mohammedan rites, the old-fashioned Six Rites or the modern non-religious and non-ritual way of marriage."[54] Western or Chinese, new or old wedding rituals were primarily a matter of individual choice. If the ritual performance and ceremonial gatherings were open enough and were recognized by observers as a celebration of marriage, a legally binding marriage would come into effect.

This twentieth-century legislative reform was itself a propelling force and a product of the contemporary cultural debates and political revolution that made family reform a cornerstone of China's modernization. Historians have studied closely how these legislative efforts reconfigured domestic relationships. Social reformers and party officials redefined marriage as a civil union between two autonomous individuals, thus undermining the parents and family elders' authority in deciding a marriage and choosing a spouse. But legal proceedings from the Beijing District Court reveal that both the GMD lawmakers of the 1930s and judicial officials in the 1940s refrained from completely changing every aspect of the existing family system. A senior GMD leader once claimed, "To reform an evil practice could take dozens or even hundreds of years and it cannot be achieved simply by issuing a single official

54. Ibid., p. 125.

order."[55] When drafting legislation, lawmakers adopted a progressive approach and avoided direct confrontation with existing social practices. They were not looking for a radical change of the wedding practices within a short period of time. The terms of the civil law enforced in 1940s Beijing were fluid and ambiguous and were subject to interpretation. It was under this open legal framework that women and men performed customary nuptials and entered into marriages recognized by the law.

Under the State's Gaze

In addition to using ritual guidelines and introducing new pieces of marriage legislation, the government also developed a bureaucratic system of marriage registration and certification. The certificate was formally introduced to local residents in Beijing in November 1931 under the GMD authority; and the official marriage registration procedures took effect in 1935. The registration process was an integral part of the government's larger endeavor in the twentieth century to remap the urban social geography in a way that would facilitate better policing and effective social management. To borrow James Scott's well-known and widely-cited argument, what set the modern state apart from its imperial predecessor is that the latter was "partially blind"—"it knew precious little about its subjects, their wealth, their landholding and yields, their location, their very identity."[56] The modern state, in contrast, had the will and, more tellingly, had developed the capacity and scientific tools to cure that administrative blindness. It held in its toolbox methods such as population census, land survey, map-making, standardization of weights and measures, taxation and conscription, and economic planning, all of which enabled avid state agents to make the world before them legible, calculable, and thus governable.

55. Shi Ying, "Shi Ying zai Guomindang zhongyang dangbu zongli jinianzhou shang tan gailiang fengsu zhongyao xing de jiangyan ci" [The speech on the importance of reforming customs given by Shi Ying at the central committee of the Nationalist Party's meeting to commemorate premier Sun Yat-sen], October 5, 1935. From Zhongguo di'er lishi dang'anguan, *Zhonghua minguoshi dang'an ziliao huibian*, p. 449.
56. Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, p. 2.

Urban administrators and social leaders in twentieth-century China demonstrated a strong impulse to reorder the society and populace. A number of programs were implemented to chart and chronicle life-cycle events and significant changes in households and neighborhoods. Aside from registering their marriages, local residents were required to report information about themselves: birth, death, sex, age, native place, income, family size, residence, occupation, illnesses, and criminal convictions. By making numbers, percentages, and the types of individual and household entries as accurate as possible and readily accessible, officials hoped to be able to respond more quickly to problems and better maintain law and order in a complex urban society and at a treacherous political time. The process of bureaucratizing details of a private individual was designed to give the government unprecedented power to monitor, manage, and even manipulate individual people; but criminal case files show that some women and men had always managed to escape the monitoring regime. More alarmingly for government officials, there had always been a neighborhood support system and a set of customary practices that allowed illegal, unlawful, and disorderly conduct to go unpunished. The last part of this chapter will study how bureaucratic procedures affected runaway women and their serial marriages and how officials handled these marriages in flux at the bottom rungs of society.

Lei Zhang Shi was a thirty-six-year-old prostitute in 1937; but she would not remain one for long. She had recently become acquainted with thirty-nine-year-old Guang Delu, a mason who occasionally visited the brothel where she stayed. They apparently got along well. As their relationship developed, Guang Delu promised Lei Zhang Shi that he would redeem her from the brothel and marry her, and he kept his word. After marrying Guang Delu, Lei Zhang Shi followed the local custom of adopting her new husband's surname and called herself Guang Lei Shi. They lived together for about four years. Then, in mid-1941, things began to fall apart. At the center of the tension was Guang Lei Shi's addiction to "white powders" (*baimian'er* 白面兒)—heroin. Her addiction quickly depleted the family savings and drove Guang Delu mad. He refused to give her any cash for fear that she would waste their all-too-scarce family resources. In April 1942, Guang Lei Shi ran off. With the help of a female neighbor, she married another man, Shi Qijian, on May 17, 1942. While Guang Lei Shi was beginning her new marriage, Guang

Delu had been busy tracking her whereabouts. His efforts eventually paid off. He found her in her new home and dragged her to the nearby police precinct office. Two weeks later, Guang Lei Shi stood on trial for bigamy at the Beijing District Court.[57]

Like all bigamy cases prosecuted in the 1940s, the court investigations focused on determining the nature of the relationships Guang Lei Shi had been involved in. To do so, the prosecutors looked into several key areas: whether she had registered her marriage with the local office of civil affairs, whether she had obtained a marriage certificate, whether she celebrated her wedding in a public ceremony, and, lastly, whether anyone attended the celebration. Both Guang Delu and Guang Lei Shi's new husband, Shi Qijian, alleged that a range of ceremonials were performed, and they both wrote down a list of family relatives, friends, and neighbors who had witnessed the celebration. In addition, Shi Qijian had registered the marriage at the district civil office and obtained a marriage certificate on the wedding day. After collecting sufficient evidence, the court convicted Guang Lei Shi of bigamy and sentenced her to two months in prison. The female neighbor who had helped Guang Lei Shi run away received a sentence of two months in prison as well.

The marriage registration process that Shi Qijian went through required the couple to go to the Bureau of Social Affairs and fill out a marriage application form (*jiehun shengqingshu* 結婚聲請書) on which they would report their name, gender, age, native province, current home address, occupation, religious affiliation, marital status (single or divorced), and, finally, to state if they were blood relatives. Each of them had to submit a four-inch photo for the marriage certificate. Next, they would jointly file a marriage affidavit (*jiehun yuanshu* 結婚願書) that affirmed their mutual agreement on the marriage. At this point, they would also provide the name of their matchmaker (*jieshaoren* 介紹人).[58] The third step required them to submit a pledge (*baozhengshu* 保證書) to confirm that all of the information they provided was accurate. After reviewing all required materials, an official at the bureau would file a ratification (*piwen* 批文) to approve the marriage application; the

57. BPDFFY, J65-6-3888, Guang Lei Shi, 1942.
58. BPSSHJ, J2-7-1300, "Jiehun shengqingshu: Hao Jianzhi and Dai Ruolan" [Marriage application form], 1935.

couple could then use the approved application to obtain their marriage certificate.[59]

Three government agencies were directly involved in issuing marriage certificates: the Bureau of Social Affairs supervised the printing process, and the Bureau of Public Safety transferred blank certificates to the District Civil Office (*qugongsuo* 區公所), which was in charge of issuing them to eligible individuals. When the registration process was first implemented in November 1931, a 1 *yuan* charge plus a 0.4 *yuan* tax stamp was applied to each certificate. The Bureau of Social Affairs kept 12 percent of the collected fee to cover production and management costs; the other two agencies were each entitled to a 4 percent share. The rest went to the Bureau of the Treasury (*caizhengju* 財政局) to support the city's expenses.[60] The puppet government continued this program after 1937, and made only one minor change on March 15, 1943, which was to raise the fee to 2 *yuan* per certificate.[61] It is unclear how many local residents had followed the registration procedures and obtained official documents. Some, such as Shi Qijian, did. The certificate he obtained became a crucial piece of evidence that helped the court convict Guang Lei Shi. A number of key design features on Shi Qijian's certificate (see fig. 13) provide insight into the way the government tried to re-conceptualize and monitor marital relationships.

The official certificate issued by the Municipal Government was different from private marriage contracts of late imperial times in several regards. First, the official document emphasized uniformity. Private contracts, in the most complete form, comprised seven documents drawn up by the two parties to a marriage. They included a "marriage proposal" (*qingshu* 請書 or *qinghunshu* 請婚書), a "reply note" (*yunshu* 允書 or *yunhunshu* 允婚書), an "eight-character note" (*gengtie* 庚帖 or *bazitie* 八字帖), a "draft marriage document" (*caotie* 草帖), a "formal marriage document" (*dingtie* 定帖), a "list of engagement gift" (*chutie* 出帖), and a "list of dowry" (*huitie* 回帖). Each document stood for the

59. BPSSHJ, J2-7-1300, "Beipingshi shehuiju youguan jiehun shijian chengxu" [Marriage registration procedures, Bureau of Social Affairs], 1935.
60. BPSZF, J1-2-25, "Beipingshi shizhi hunshu faxing zhangcheng" [Regulation on the issuance of municipality-printed marriage certificates], November 1931.
61. BPSZF, J1-2-146, "Xiuzheng Beijing tebieshi shizhi hunshu faxing zhangcheng" [The revised regulation on the issuance of municipality-printed marriage certificates], December 1942.

completion of one step in the entire ritual sequence and had its own legal worth. What complicates matters is that each of these private documents had several names. For example, the "formal marriage document" was also called, because of its ritual significance and its design, the "grand document" (*datie* 大帖), "mandarin duck letter" (*yuanyangtie* 鴛鴦帖), "letter of rite" (*lishu* 禮書), "gold leaf letter" (*xiaojinshu* 銷金書), and "dragon and phoenix document" (*longfengtie* 龍鳳帖)."[62] Unlike the multifarious private contracts, the official municipal certificate had just one name and was printed on a single piece of paper. Although there was not a national marriage certificate in China in the 1930s and 1940s, and although the size, design, and wording of the official certificate varied by region, the certificate was kept consistent in terms of size and design within a single jurisdiction.

Second, the official certificate had a universal format as opposed to the multifarious designs of private contracts. Private documents had different formats, depending on factors such as the social background of the parties to a marriage, the history of their prior marriages, and the post-marital arrangements. In his study of marital practices in Minong, Taiwan, Myron Cohen concludes that in marriages between elite families, contracts were "highly ritualized in content, in physical form, and even in the type of paper used."[63] They were printed on red paper with a cover design featuring a motif of dragon and phoenix, and celebratory phrases such as "prosperity brought by the dragon and the phoenix" (*longfeng chengxiang* 龍鳳呈祥) or "a match made by heaven" (*tianzuo zhihe* 天作之合). But for people in the lower socioeconomic classes, historians Guo Songyi and Ding Yizhuang find, contracts were written in plain and straightforward language with little cosmic-religious elaboration. The contracts were mainly for practical use; they were designed to specify the conditions under which the marriage was formed and the restrictions and rights for each of the parties to a marriage. For example, in the case of a matrilocal marriage, the groom was required by custom to move in with the bride's family and to support his parents-in-law while they were alive. The contract prescribes that any failure to fulfill such obligations would result in the repatriation of the wife's betrothal gifts and dowry. Likewise, contracts for remarried widows

62. Guo and Ding, *Qingdai minjian hunshu yanjiu*, pp. 37–60.
63. Cohen, "Writs of Passage in Late Imperial China," p. 59.

or child brides often included a set of agreements covering the dowry, inheritance rights, and the number of annual natal-home visits.[64]

Mass-produced manual books in late imperial China provided a large number of samples instructing people how to draw up the document properly.[65] But when the twentieth-century official certificate came into effect in Beijing, the ritual language and allusions to feudal notions were replaced by a uniform layout featuring plainly worded, basic personal information of the two parties to the marriage. At the top are the couple's names, ages, dates of birth, native places, the date when the certificate was issued, and the certificate's serial number. Following this information, in the middle section, the names of the couple's parents, grandparents, and great grandparents are listed. Then, at the bottom of the page, the bride and groom, the witness, and the masters of matrimony sign their names (see fig 13).

Third, the official certificate transferred the right of making a marriage decision and writing the marital rights and responsibilities to the couple themselves. Late imperial contracts included the records or pedigree of the groom's parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents;[66] some even listed only the names of the groom's father and the matchmaker, and not that of the groom. The bride's parents, instead of the bride, drafted and signed a reply note to express their opinion of the groom's family and the terms of the marriage contract. After the proposal stage, it was also the parents and family elders who wrote the formal marriage document. GMD judicial official Vermier Y. Chiu commented on the late imperial situation: "Marriage contracted by the parties to the marriage themselves instead of being effected by their parents is null and void and of no legal effect."[67] Only those at the bottom of society—men, and sometimes women—would step in and negotiate their own marriages, and would even sign the document themselves without letting their parents and family elders control the process. This happened, as Guo Songyi and Ding Yizhuang emphasize, mostly when a man was marrying a widow, taking a concubine, or

64. Translations of various samples of marriage contracts can be seen in Cohen, "Writs of Passage in Late Imperial China," pp. 59–68; Guo and Ding, *Qingdai minjian hunshu yanjiu*, pp. 107–20.

65. Ebrey, *Chu Hsi's Family Rituals*, p. 51.

66. Chiu, *Marriage Laws and Customs of China*, p. 76.

67. Ibid., p. 77.

Marriage Certificate (no. 57696)

Shi Qijian, 54, born on September 26, native of Xiangcheng at Henan Province,
and
Lei Shi Shi, 35, born on March 17, native of Xiangfu at Henan Province,
are married on May 17, the thirty-first year of the Republic (1942).

Male party's great-grandfather: Jiesan; grandfather: Gongjiu; father: Xintong;
Male party's great grandmother: ; grandmother: ; mother: Zeng Shi;
Female party's great grandfather: Libing; grandfather: Zhenxiao; father: Liqing;
Female party's great grandmother: ; grandmother: ; mother: Cheng Shi.

Male party to the marriage: Shi Qijian;
Female party to the marriage: Shi Lei Shi;
Witness: Zhang Liu Shi;
Introducer: Zhang Liu Shi;
Master of matrimony on behalf of male party: Shi Qijian;
Master of matrimony on behalf of female party: Ai Laishun.

May 17, the thirty-first year of the Republic (1942)
Printed and issued by the Bureau of Social Affairs, Beijing Municipal Government.

FIGURE 13. The Municipal Marriage Certificate of Shi Qijian and Guang Lei Shi.

entering a matrilocal marriage. The situation is different when it comes to the twentieth-century municipal certificate. Parents' and grandparents' names are listed, but they were there primarily as a courtesy to the family rather than as an affirmation of parental authority on marriage. On Shi Qijian's certificate, the newlyweds even left the names of some of their grand- and great-grandparents blank; and apparently, they could still obtain the certificate with those names omitted. Parental consent was not required to establish a legally binding marriage.[68]

New measures were implemented to bureaucratize life-cycle events. As the new design features of the marriage certificate have shown, the bureaucratization process attempted to downplay a wedding's cosmo-

68. The practice of marginalizing the parental voice continued into the socialist and contemporary period. In fact, official marriage licenses issued by the Communist authorities did not ask for parents' information, which further curtailed parents' authority over their children's marriages.

logical connotation and familial significance, and simplified it as a routine administrative task. Official registration was intended to generate a paper trail that would allow government agencies to keep track of the transition of a person's life from singlehood or widowhood to marriage. The uniform municipal marriage certificate, together with the administrative impulse that invented it and bureaucratic resources that supported it, seems to suggest, in James Scott's definition, a modern state on the rise. But criminal case files allow us to study the state/society equation from the perspective of the receiving end. An examination of unregistered marriages and serial marriages illuminates what state agents could do when they found the "attempt to make a society legible" met with resistance.[69]

In August 1935, twenty-four-year-old Hao Jianzhi, an employee of the School of Engineering at Peking University, planned to marry eighteen-year-old Dai Ruolan. They filed an application at the Bureau of Social Affairs and registered their marriage. They also scheduled a wedding ceremony at the bureau's auditorium at 3 p.m. on November 29, 1935. But sudden political unrest put the Municipal Government on high alert and forced it to enforce a curfew.[70] As a result of the tense situation, the Bureau of Social Affairs closed its office and notified the Hao couple that their scheduled wedding ceremony would have to be postponed. The young couple could not wait any longer, so they held their wedding ceremony at a different location. After the martial law was lifted, they jointly filed a petition letter to the Bureau of Social Affairs with three requests: a full refund of their four *yuan* registration fee, a return of all the documents they had submitted to the government, and to "[withdraw] their marriage registration" (*chexiao jiehun dengji* 撤消結婚登記). Their reason for the requests was that their wedding ceremony at the bureau's auditorium had been cancelled.

The officials denied their petition. In their reply, they made it clear to the Hao couple that the fee was to cover the administrative costs and that it was non-refundable after the marriage registration process had been completed. As to the wedding ceremony scheduled in the bureau's auditorium, it was, to begin with, an "additional service" (*fudai banfa* 附帶辦法) provided by the government for the convenience of the

69. Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, p. 2.
70. Beijingshi shehui kexueyuan lishi yanjiusuo, *Beijing lishi jinian*, pp. 320–22.

newlyweds. Since it was basically a separate and supplementary part of the Hao couple's marriage registration, the government had no obligation to refund the registration fee. With regard to their request to withdraw their marriage registration, officials claimed that they could only do so if they wished to be divorced.[71] The young couple's petitions and the official response reveal the different views on the meaning of the municipal marriage certificate and the registration process. To the officials, the paper trail and procedures had a legal function that validated a marital relationship, but the Hao couple thought differently as they regarded the official certificate and the registration process not as a mandatory requirement for establishing a legally binding marriage.

Unregistered marriages, for whatever reason, were fairly common in early twentieth-century Beijing. Many local residents never bothered to go down the path of registering their marital relationship with the local civil office. An examination of the ways in which the government managed to handle this problem will show how officials tried to accommodate customary practices in their daily administration. In essence, the language of the official regulations concerning marriage registration was weak; and as such the municipal document was presented as an option as opposed to a compulsory requirement for the establishment of a legally binding marriage. The official regulation stated that "for residents of Beijing, both the male party and female party ought to (*ying* 應) obtain a marriage certificate and to fill it out properly as a proof of their relationship be it for marriage or remarriage."[72] The word "ought to" in this sentence imposes this obligation on its benefactor. But as Claudia and Lester Ross argue, there are two types of legal obligations. One is a "deontic obligation" rendered by English words like "should" and "ought to," or Chinese words like *ying*, *dang* 當, *yingdang* 應當, *yinggai* 應該, and *gai* 該. This obligation is "defined by the explicit or implicit rules (laws, customs, conventions) of the society to which one belongs." Nonetheless, these are weak commitments and "no direct consequences are necessarily associated with the nonperformance of deontic obligations."[73] In comparison, there is a "technical obligation,"

71. BPSSHJ, J2-7-1300, "Piwen: Hao Jianzhi and Dai Ruolan" [Response to Hao Jianzhi and Dai Ruolan's petition], 1935.
72. BPSZF, J1-2-146, "Xiuzheng Beijing tebieshi shizhi hunshu faxing zhangcheng."
73. Ross and Ross, "Language and Law," pp. 224–26. In a more recent study by Deborah Cao, she identifies three categories of legal obligations: (1) "imperative

rendered by English words like "must" and "shall," or Chinese equivalents like *bi* 必 and *bixü* 必須. These obligations usually imply mandatory and compulsive requirements "associated with certain specific negative consequences if they are not fulfilled." By *not* using the strong words *bi* and *bixü*, officials had in fact downplayed the imperative sense of the requirement concerning government certificates in the first place.

Other articles further reduced the authority of the official marriage certificate. The regulation never claimed that the municipal certificate was the only legal proof of a valid marital relationship. In other words, although the regulation made it clear that the Municipal Government was to be the sole provider of the new official marriage certificate, it did not outlaw other forms of private contracts. Private issuance of certificates "by individual peoples or organizations" would be subjected to a fine of ten to twenty *yuan*.[74] In imposing this fine, the government excluded commercial organizations and individuals from sharing the profits generated by the new program. Nonetheless, the regulation did not mention the legality of various forms of private contracts printed by commercial organizations and widely used by local residents. The lack of any clear and unambiguous regulation banning private contracts suggests an acknowledgement of the existence and validity of other forms of non-official documents. The administrative personnel were also ambiguous about their legislations. As one Republican lawmaker commented, "No provision is made, either by the Ch'ing Law or by the Civil Code of the Republic, for the registration of marriages or for the issuance of marriage certificates by the government."[75]

The administrative process also gave residents further leeway in dealing with their unregistered marriages. The sixth article read: "For a resident living in Beijing, should he/she marry without securing (*rubu lingyong* 如不領用) the municipality-printed certificate, as soon as this conduct is detected by authorities (*yijing chachu* 一經查出), he/she will be ordered to re-register their marriage and he/she will be charged

language which imposes an obligation to do," e.g., shall; (2) "facultative language which confers a right privilege or power," e.g., may; (3) "prohibitive language which imposes an obligation to abstain from doing an act," e.g., shall not. Cao, *Chinese Law*, pp. 56–57.

74. BPSZF, J1-2-146, "Xiuzheng Beijing tebieshi shizhi hunshu faxing zhangcheng."

75. Chiu, *Marriage Laws and Customs of China*.

twice the original fee."[76] The statement was written in the subjunctive mood, which suggests a hypothetical notion, implying that there would be a negative consequence for not meeting the official requirement only if the government happened to discover the offense. Since officials at the time did not have a program that enabled them to track every single marriage established within their jurisdiction, unless individuals referenced an unregistered marriage during subsequent arbitration, there was nothing that officials could do to stop unregistered marriages. Moreover, people who did not register their marriages were only subjected to a monetary fine, and the validity of their marriage was ultimately not questioned. From this particular article, one could get the sense that a private contract alone was enough to document a marital relationship and that the marriage registration process merely made it more "official."

By Western standards, vagueness and ambiguity in legal codes could generate a number of serious problems; they "render officials hesitant to enforce an uncertain mandate, limit the power of state organs to enforce obligations, and breed uncertainty in contractual negotiations."[77] But the marriage registration in pre-war and wartime Beijing did not stem from technical incompetence in the policy-making and legislation process; the regulations put forward by the officials and lawmakers were in fact purposefully implicit in order to accommodate customary practices. The officials deliberately chose "weak markers" and vague language when drafting regulations governing the marriage certificate program. But when dealing with other, more acute, issues, such as tightening public security and implementing a food-rationing system, they switched to "strong markers" without hesitation. For example, when implementing the new control system of residence cards, which I discussed in chapter 6, officials used a series of strong words to stress the compulsoriness of this vital security program. Noticeably, officials used strong words like "must" and "shall not" fourteen times in a short text. Weak words denoting "deontic obligation" did appear, but they were usually followed by either a strong word or a strict requirement that eliminates room for ambiguity. For instance, in 1938, when the Police Department introduced the provisional residence card (*linshi*

76. BPSZF, J1-2-146, "Xiuzheng Beijing tebieshi shizhi hunshu faxing zhangcheng."
77. Ross and Ross, "Language and Law," p. 223.

juzhu zhengmingpiao 臨時居住證明票) in suburban Beijing, the eighth article read: "At the time when people are issued a residence card, they should be informed to carry it all the time. People shall not lose or lend cards to other people" 發放證明票時應傳知個該承領人隨身佩帶, 不得轉借他人或遺失.[78]

Officials could have completely denied the legality of any unregistered marriage. But such an outright rejection would have been impractical, straining the administration's resources. It would have put the law in direct confrontation with the social reality that many people were getting married with only private contracts or without documentation at all, thus leaving the administrative body with an overwhelming number of unregistered marriages to handle. This was not in the government's best interests. Such a strict stance would also have undermined the authority of the official programs and the credibility of new documents. Because there was little chance for officials to successfully change the social reality within a short period of time, they had to figure out proper ways to accommodate the leeway in their daily administration and adjudication.

Conclusion

Early twentieth-century ethnographic accounts and foreigners' travelogues often describe customary wedding rituals in an amusing tone, viewing them as examples of street festivity and popular neighborhood entertainment characterizing Beijing's cultural landscape. But the social and political leaders at the time held a different view. They criticized old nuptials as signs of "feudal," "foolish," "backward," and "superstitious" traditions. A larger historical development in early twentieth-century China inspired this form of critical rhetoric and propelled the reform efforts. Political leaders, lawmakers, and social reformers joined forces in campaigns to raise public awareness of the patriarchal pattern of household authority and women's subjugation. They believed that the

78. BPSJCJ, J181-17-60, "Beijingshi gongshu jingchaju fafang sijiao juzhu zhengmingpiao banfa" [Regulation on the issuance of residence card in suburban Beijing by the Beijing Municipal Police Department], December 1938.

struggling Chinese nation-state desperately needed independent women and productive families. They engaged in intense discussions in which they tackled a range of topics such as ancestral worship, family structure, the meaning of marriage, spousal selection, concubinage, and divorce to search for ways to reform. By envisioning the wedding ceremony as a new and "civilized" spectacle, political leaders attempted to transform marriage into a reformist institution centered on the family with equal rights and opportunities for both men and women.

While twentieth-century lawmakers and administrators attacked patriarchal authority to free women from restrictions that had denied them the equal right to marriage and divorce, they also tried to introduce another set of requirements to ensure that women would follow the lawful avenues to enter or leave a marital relationship and that the marital flexibility conformed to the new legal and administrative framework. All these reform efforts and the establishment of state-centered rites, languages, and social structures might have bolstered the government's role as the agent of change and the ultimate authority in the realm of private life.

Nonetheless, the bigamy trials in Beijing District Court offer a new perspective on the dramatic change in the relationship between the state and society. Many local residents ignored marriage certificates and official registration procedures, and continued carrying out traditional nuptials. Thus, official documentation did not become the critical component of a legally established marriage. Instead, the customary nuptials and recognition of the marriage by neighbors and witnesses gave women their status as a wife and secured them a legitimate place in their community. Rather than denying the legality of these customary nuptials and unregistered relationships, judiciary and civil bodies in the 1930s and 1940s tended to endorse this neighborhood recognition. Their endorsement left room for ordinary women and men to decide on matters of their personal lives. It was under this circumstance that some women were able to engage in fluid and transient marital relationships, which increased their chances of survival in wartime Beijing.

PART III

On the Move

CHAPTER FIVE

Mobility and Survival Tactics

Zhang Shaoting grew up in Heilongjiang Province, in the northern part of Manchuria. In 1937, at the age of eighteen, her parents arranged her marriage to a local businessman. From the beginning of the marriage, she did not get along well with her husband, and their deteriorating living conditions only made matters worse. Their province, which had been under Japanese occupation since late 1931, was administered by the state of Manchukuo. As the Sino-Japanese conflict developed into a full-fledged war in 1937, the province was carefully transformed into a support base for Japan's larger invasion efforts. Civilian food supply was cut back, and market control was tightened. Ordinary people like Zhang Shaoting and her husband suffered immensely from these measures. In the midst of emotional distress and economic hardship, she made the acquaintance of a rickshaw puller surnamed Yuan. Their relationship quickly developed, and one day, Yuan proposed to take her away to his hometown, where he promised her a better life. Zhang Shaoting readily agreed. In late 1937, she and Yuan traveled more than 600 kilometers south to Fengtian (in Liaoning Province).

Upon arrival, however, she made a shocking discovery: Yuan was already married. He and his wife themselves were barely making ends meet. Having abandoned her marriage for a hopeless love affair, Zhang Shaoting found herself trapped. In early 1938, her life changed again. Sojourning at Fengtian, she was introduced by Yuan to another man, He Qingfeng, who worked at a Japanese-run railway station. After stopping by Yuan's place and chatting with her a couple of times, He Qingfeng offered eighty *yuan* to Yuan in exchange for her companionship. Both Yuan and Zhang Shaoting agreed. Then she began living with He Qingfeng and adopted his surname by calling herself He Zhang

Shi. Hoping for a fresh start and a better life in a new place, the couple traveled 700 kilometers south by train. Their destination was Beijing.[1]

He Zhang Shi's case brings to light an old strategy women used as a way out of emotional stress, financial pressure, or both: they hit the road to escape an abusive family or to seek a better livelihood. Legal documents in late imperial China, including both the routine memorials of the Board of Punishment in Beijing and litigation records of the magistrate court at the county level, describe many instances wherein women ran away from home and went through periods of unsettlement and uncertainty before facing the imperial justice system.[2] He Zhang Shi, like her imperial sisters, traveled to search for a stable relationship that could meet her emotional and financial needs. Her travel experience, though intensely emotional, was perhaps easier logistically than that of her predecessors, as this chapter will demonstrate. By the time she set out on her journey, three major railroads and eight modern roads had connected Beijing to its regional neighbors. Road works in the early twentieth century facilitated new forms of transport. Passenger train service provided reasonable options for people to travel between metropolitan areas; long-distance bus routes connected urban areas to peripheral townships in the countryside. These modern forms of transport transformed what would have been a slow, long, exhausting, and costly journey into a relatively convenient and less expensive trip with some degree of comfort.

Over the course of three years, He Zhang Shi traveled across four provinces in Manchuria and north China, all of which were under Japanese occupation. The war and the change in regime redrew the political landscape in north China and, at the same time, affected travel, transport, and trade between Beijing and its regional neighbors. The occupation, as David Barrett summarizes, emphasized "points" and "lines"—the Japanese army maintained, on the one hand, effective control over concentrated areas of population and trading centers and, on the other hand, key transportation lines such as railways and major roads.[3] The expansive system of railroad transport in north China

1. BPDFFY, J65-4-1516, Yin Shiming, 1939.
2. See Spence, *Death of Woman Wang*; Paderni, "I Thought I Would Have Some Happy Days."
3. Barrett, "Introduction: Occupied China and the Limits of Accommodation," p. 2.

allowed the Japanese army to deploy troops and move supplies efficiently; it therefore became the Chinese guerrilla force's chief target of sabotage. That being said, women's experiences as revealed in He Zhang Shi's case move our attention away from the masculine world of control and exploitation, resistance and sacrifice; they instead put the focus on how women interpreted and coped with the changes brought about by war amidst their daily struggle to survive. In other words, the experience of He Zhang Shi and her partner from 1937 to 1939 reveals more than one individual's movement across regions; it brings to light the ways in which women crossed administrative borders and played an active but controversial role in the regional flow of goods and people.

Women's choices and decisions, and the remarkable degree of geographic mobility exhibited by their experiences, reveal a region that was politically fractured but economically and socially integrated. There was a sustained market for women's productive, sexual, and reproductive labors. Women were in demand, and their bodies and labor were made invaluable through a spectrum of arrangements by which they stayed with men. Marriage was a desirable option to many women because it helped them (re)gain a piece of stable life that offered some degree of emotional satisfaction and, more importantly, economic security. But at the same time, the market presented a dangerous array of opportunities that would bring women into the criminal world of servitude, bigamy, illegitimate relationships, prostitution, and other kinds of illegal schemes. This kind of market demand, as Matthew Sommer and Johanna Ransmeier have studied, existed in late imperial and early Republican China and offered a useful (albeit sad) option for struggling families to trade their wives and daughters for subsistence needs.[4] Mindful of these precedents, in this chapter I demonstrate how key forces such as technological improvements, war, and military occupation in north China facilitated travel, stimulated business transactions, and expanded both the market for women and women's potential gains from the market.

Buying and selling women was an integral part of a larger regional flow of people and goods between Beijing and its neighboring provinces. Criminal case files demonstrate that supply shortages and the existence of a rationing regime under the Japanese occupation and during the following Civil War perpetuated a rampant black market for a variety

4. Sommer, "Making Sex Work"; Ransmeier, "'No Other Choice.'"

of items ranging from staple foods, daily necessities, and medicines to narcotics, weapons, and military intelligence. The war campaigns and guerrilla sabotage might have occasionally disrupted such regional commercial and social "unity"; but the market continued to operate and even grew steadily as the war raged on and the economic situation in Beijing deteriorated. Like human traffickers who bought and sold women, the smugglers understood how the principles of supply and demand were enacted on a regional scale. Women and men pursued innovative tactics, traversed hostile terrain, and crossed administrative boundaries to make money from the illegal transactions. These criminal activities were an economic reality for lower-class women during the war and thus made women a visible and controversial force that remapped economic and social geographies in north China.

Life in Motion

When they arrived in Beijing, He Qingfeng found a job in a Japanese trading firm and worked every day while He Zhang Shi took care of their home. Beneath the surface of their seemingly uneventful life, pressures were mounting between the couple. According to He Zhang Shi, the crux of the tension was money. She was jobless, and He Qingfeng brought home little income. It was at this time that another man, He Qingfeng's coworker Yin Shiming, entered her life. Because he could speak some Japanese, Yin Shiming handled all correspondence between the Japanese and the Chinese traders in his firm and thus was better off financially than He Qingfeng. He Zhang Shi began to spend time with Yin Shiming when He Qingfeng was away. Their relationship grew increasingly close. In September 1938, He Zhang Shi attempted to run off with Yin Shiming but was quickly caught by He Qingfeng. After the incident, He Qingfeng moved his family to a new place in order to keep his wife away from his co-worker. Despite his efforts, in less a month, He Zhang Shi ran off again. She first hid in Yutai Hotel for about ten days and then was joined by Yin Shiming, who had quit his job. They rented a room in the Inner-3 District. Over the next several months, He Qingfeng never gave up his hope of finding his runaway wife. His perseverance paid off in late July 1939, when he ran into He Zhang Shi at the temple fair near Chaoyang Gate. He took

her to the police and filed a criminal lawsuit at Beijing District Court accusing Yin Shiming of kidnapping his wife.

He Zhang Shi's unsettled life reveals women's understanding of the city's complex map of sources of support in relation to urban public spaces such as tenement neighborhoods, railway stations, and hotels. They were places to make contacts, to escape from troubles, and to find temporary shelter. Although the public space was so essential to women's urban experience, many of these places remained off-limits to women until the waning years of the Qing dynasty. The restrictions came in part from conservative social views that upheld the idea of confining women to "inner quarters." Chapter 6 will examine both the gender norm as an ideal and a practice in late imperial China and the degree to which it was moderated under the pressures of early twentieth-century legal and social reform movements. This chapter draws attention to other more pragmatic problems that had kept women off the roadways in imperial times, including hostile terrain, lack of navigable waterways, primitive means of transport, concerns about road safety, and travel fatigue and cost.

To be clear, mobility had already been substantially improved in late imperial China. Men traveled to develop careers, expand businesses, and sometimes to pursue illegal dealings. Timothy Brook shows that the Ming Empire in the fourteenth century created and subsidized three travel services—the courier service (*yichuan* 驛傳), the postal service (*jidi* 寄遞), and the transport service (*diyun* 遞運)—to dispatch political messages and to facilitate grain shipments and the stationing of soldiers throughout the empire.[5] When the state-financed travel network collapsed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, privately owned transport services thrived. Boats, vehicles, travel guides and maps, and food and lodging services were readily available at a reasonable price.[6] By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, both the burgeoning national markets (specializing in staple foods and key commodities such as salt and tea) and the expanding rural trade sustained "immigrant cities" and "migrant communities" populated by guest merchants and migrant laborers. Key urban institutions, such as native place associations, guilds, and pervasive secret societies, represented "a high level

5. Brook, *The Confusions of Pleasure*, p. 34.
6. Ibid., pp. 174–82.

of geographic mobility."[7] The movement of goods and people transformed many cities' social and cultural rubrics. Because of its central position in national politics and commerce, Beijing remained a popular travel and business destination in late imperial China. However, traveling over long distances remained a daunting undertaking, both physically and logistically. The following case of a woman in flight, together with diaries and travelogues from other travelers, helps us to fathom the difficulties and hardships that travelers encountered and to appreciate the significant change in travel experience that occurred between the late imperial and Republican periods.

Yang Hu Shi was twenty-nine years old in 1944 and married to Yang Xing, a rickshaw puller. When Yang Xing turned forty-one in 1943, he found that pulling a rickshaw on the street every day was too much for a man of his age, and so he took a job at a factory weaving socks. But because he was not skillful at handling machines, Yang Xing soon gave up the weaving job and pulled a rickshaw again. However, as his health deteriorated over the next few months, his income dwindled. Yang Hu Shi had to share the burden of the family budget. She walked to Xinjiekou, a commercial district in the northern part of the inner city, hoping to mend and wash clothing for customers. On her daily journey she came to know a forty-two-year-old woman named Meng Song Shi. The elder woman persuaded Yang Hu Shi to run away from home to find a financially reliable husband. Under Meng Song Shi's arrangement, Yang Hu Shi left Yang Xing in December 1943. She was taken to Zhangjiakou first and then to Zhuolu County, where she was sold to a peasant. Back in Beijing, Yang Xing reported his wife missing to the police. After an investigation that lasted for about a month, police officers rescued Yang Hu Shi and arrested Meng Song Shi.[8]

Zhuolu County was on the provincial border between Hebei and Chahar, about 130 kilometers west of Beijing. The county was located in the heart of farm country; a quarter of its farmlands were rice paddies and the rest grew wheat. Although the local economy relied primarily on agriculture, Zhuolu County had always been very close to the busy and vibrant trans-regional and international trade operations. An overland caravan trade route wound through the county's northern border, which connected Beijing, via Zhangjiakou, to the Mongolian steppe

7. Rowe, *Hankow: Commerce and Society,* p. 213.
8. BPDFFY, J65-8-5887, Meng Song Shi, 1944.

and beyond. Commercial activities turned this landlocked region into a major trading corridor in north China.

Notwithstanding the busy flow of goods and people, the caravan route was by no means friendly to travelers before the twentieth century. North China was notorious for spring sandstorms, summer heat waves, and winter chills. In addition to these climatic discomforts, the roads posed a formidable challenge. At the turn of the twentieth century, there was not a single road, inside the city of Beijing or in its surrounding environs, that was wide, smooth, and strong enough for automobiles. Most roads were made of light and loose soil. This caused many problems. During spring and winter, the dry and gusty winds picked up the yellow soil and "manage(d) to cover everything with a layer of grayish-black dust."[9] "Travel on the streets is anything but pleasant," Sidney Gamble wrote, "and sometimes is almost impossible, the air is so filled."[10] A small amount of rain would turn the roads into "impassable lakes in which horses and mules were sometimes drowned" (see figs. 14 and 15).[11] Since "the Chinese could not make a good road," Gamble reiterated the local saying, "they made an indestructible cart."[12] But mule carts caused further damage by carving deep ruts in the road. The dirt-top road was perhaps the most memorable scene for travelers who visited north China. Bumps and paddles were commonplace and were either the result of the inability of a cash-strapped government to fund public work or vandalism by local villagers (see fig. 14). One traveler wrote:

> The actual or recognized, the traditional, conventional road, a mere cut or ditch worn deep in the clay of the plain, was a floundering, bottomless mud trough all the way, and we drove around it, never in it, zigzagging at right angles all over the Peking plain. In every field and millet-patch some man lay in wait to ostentatiously throw a spoonful of dirt in the rut or the ditch he had himself made, and then extend his hand for coin. … In every rainy season for uncounted years the same tricks have been resorted to on the Peking plain, the people digging holes to break donkeys' legs, and tossing handfuls of dirt in as a cart approaches.[13]

9. Gamble, *Peking: A Social Survey*, p. 52.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid., p. 54.
13. E. A. Scidmore, *China: The Long-Lived Empire*, 1900. From Elder, *Old Peking*, p. 228.

Figure 14. "Passengers and Japanese Soldiers Standing Next to Truck Stuck in the Mud on the Road from Beijing to Chengde." Hedda Morrison, photographer. Courtesy of Hedda Morrison Photographs of China, Harvard-Yenching Library (HM11.2234).

Furthermore, means of transport in the area were under-developed. During the early Republican years, Beijing had remained largely a pedestrian city, and workplaces and grocery shops were usually within walking distance of one's home, so that people could always move around on foot. Rickshaw emerged as a favorite means of conveyance that allowed urban residents to crisscross Beijing's labyrinths of alleyways. By sociologist Li Jinghan's estimate, there were over 60,000 rickshaw pullers pulling 44,200 vehicles in the mid-1920s in Beijing (see fig. 15).[14] Other means of transport, such as pull carts, single-wheeled carts, and bicycles, were commonly seen on the street as well (see fig. 16). If traveling over a short distance outside of city, one could also opt for

14. Li Jinghan, "Beijing renli chefu xianzhuang de diaocha," p. 1153.

FIGURE 15. “American Board District, Blind Beggar.” He is surrounded by rickshaw pullers on a muddy road after rain. Sidney D. Gamble, photographer. Courtesy of Sidney D. Gamble Photographs, Archive of Documentary Arts, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University (290A_1658).

FIGURE 16. "Street with Vendors' Carts, Rickshaws, and Bicycles." Hedda Morrison, photographer. Courtesy of Hedda Morrison Photographs of China, Harvard-Yenching Library (HM19.6755).

the donkey (*jiao lüzi* 腳驢子) (see fig. 17). Donkey drivers were mostly from local villages. During the slack season, they drove their donkeys to the city gates to pick up fares. They cleaned their donkeys thoroughly and decorated them with strings of jingling bells, and red tassels hung from the bridle. They also brought with them a high padded saddle for the passenger. The cost of a donkey ride varied according to distance, remoteness of the destination, and road conditions.[15]

Camel caravans were the principal long-haul carriers in the region and "a common sight relished by foreign tourists" until at least the 1930s. A foreign traveler wrote:

> In the old days before the Boxers, the Peking railway station was far beyond the walls of even the Chinese city—which has not a tithe of the

15. Zhao Chunxiao, *Jingcheng jiushi zatan*, p. 49.

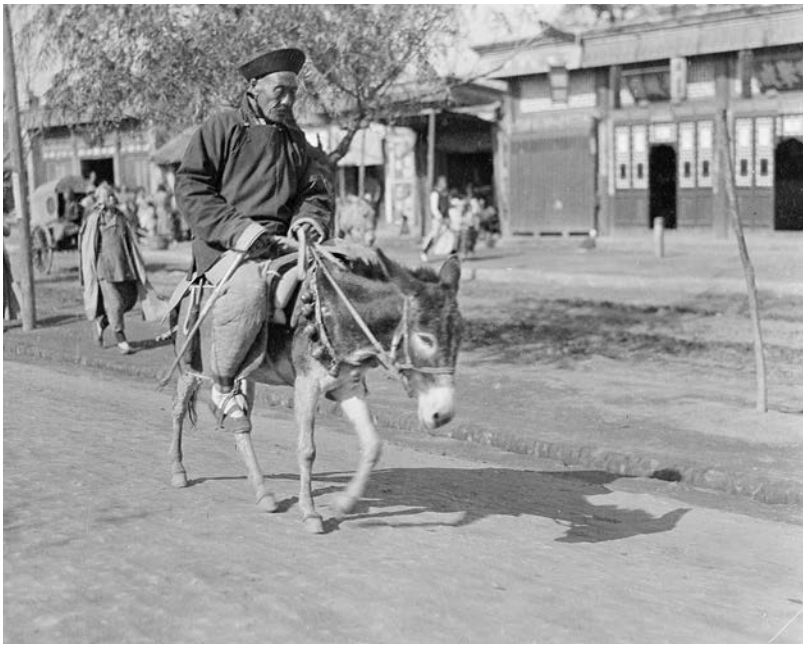

Figure 17. "Old Man and Donkey." Sidney D. Gamble, photographer. Courtesy of Sidney D. Gamble Photographs, Archive of Documentary Arts, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University (103A_575).

luster of the Tartar city, and is rather humble. Then you had to ride or drive from Machiapu (Majiapu), which is three miles beyond the Yung Ting Men or Gate of Eternal Prosperity, and proceed two miles straight through the Chinese town, until you came on the mighty bastions and keeps of the Ch'ien Men (Qianmen) or Main Entrance to the Tartar City, where the pleasure of your fantastic entry smote you full, and you hugged yourself even in the choking dust at an enchanted prospect which had no equal. For here would be great strings of camels halted in the wrong places, and calling streams of blasphemy from every other mother's son who trod or rode the roads: camels laden with merchandise and coal, and snarling shrilly after the manner of their kind at the indignities to which they were put. If it were winter there would be plenty of riding camels too, with Mongol men and women seated on top, kicking their beasts along in their coloured boots, and threading through the crush with marvelous skill. Sometimes there were two people mounted on a single animal, the woman on the pillion, clutching tightly to the man and laughing down at all who stared. Then there were strange palanquings

> slung between two mules, with sword-armed and dust-covered cavaliers ambling alongside, who had come all the way down through the great passes from distant Shansi (Shanxi) and Shensi (Shaanxi), and sometimes even from Mohammedan Kansu (Gansu), which is very far.[16]

For the overland caravan route that ran through Zhuolu County, before modern forms of transport were introduced, it had posed a daunting challenge to travelers. It was a slow journey, taking at least four days "in the saddle, chilled with the night air" with just a few halts "in a dirty, cold room" to complete the journey from Beijing to Zhangjiakou.[17] Some sections were life threatening. For example, at the Juyong Pass, which was about sixty kilometers to Beijing's north, travelers left the plain and entered the mountainous area. "Although there is here a great traffic between Tibet, Mongolia, Russia and China," a British traveler wrote in 1898, "the road in many places was all but impassable, not to say extremely dangerous, skirting as it does precipitous rocks where the slip of a hoof on the part of either mule might end in a fatal accident."[18] Despite all these challenges, the caravan route attracted entrepreneur merchants and enthusiastic adventurers in late imperial and early Republican China who dreamed of building a business enterprise or achieving some great discovery. However, it was nearly physically unthinkable and logistically infeasible for women to attempt such a journey.

By 1943, however, when runaway wife Yang Hu Shi and her neighbor Meng Song Shi made the journey in search of a new marriage for Yang Hu Shi, the road was no longer a formidable obstacle. Neither woman left any details regarding her travel experience; but roughly a decade prior to their travel, a government employee named He Taisun traveled on the same route between Beijing and Zhangjiakou with a stop at Zhuolu County. His travel diary gives us some insights. He Taisun had joined a field research team on a government mission to study key factors that relate to the agricultural economy in north China, such as land reclamation, peasant life, local products, weather and soil

16. B. L. Putnam Weale, *The Reshaping of the Far East*, 1905. From Elder, *Old Peking*, pp. 23–24.
17. Prerejevalsky, *Mongolia*, pp. 35–36.
18. Thomson, *Through China with a Camera*, p. 268.

conditions, annual rainfall, agricultural technology, tenancy, and local customs.[19] The assigned task required the research team to make several stops at a number of key counties, and the first on their itinerary was Zhangjiakou.

On the day of their departure, He Taisun got up at around six o'clock in the morning, and carried his luggage and traveled on a rickshaw to the Qianmen East Station to meet other team members inside the terminal. They purchased tickets and got on board. The train departed on time. Three hours later it entered the mountainous area, and around noon it traveled across a region of plains and deserts. At three o'clock in the afternoon, the train arrived at Zhangjiakou. In less than eight hours they traveled over the same distance that would have taken caravan traders four days to complete. It seems that the intra-city trip was not at all wearying. Once leaving the station at Zhangjiakou, He Taisun and his team spent the rest of the afternoon visiting the general secretary of the provincial government to deliver a report to the local officials explaining their research mission.[20]

He Taisun and his team stationed themselves in Zhangjiakou for a few days and took short trips to nearby counties to conduct research. For one trip to Zhuolu, the county where Yang Hu Shi was bound in 1943, He Taisun wrote in his diary that he arrived at the Zhangjiakou railway station around 10:30 in the morning and boarded the train at 11:30. After an hour-long trip, he and other team members disembarked at Xiahuayuan to make the connection to a long-distance bus that would take them to the county seat. The bus terminal was located near a small open marketplace within walking distance of the train station. The bus company was something of a government subsidiary, affiliated with the GMD army stationed nearby. It owned a few vehicles and operated the service twice a day that connected the train station to the county seat. The bus arrived around 2:30 in the afternoon, and He Taisun and his team got on board. It is not clear from He Taisun's diary what his bus looked like, but historian Frank Dikotter's study provides some clues:

> In the years before the Second World War only the chassis of many heavy-duty motor vehicles was imported and truck bodies were built to

19. He, *Zhangjiakou shixi diaocha riji*, p. 94410.
20. Ibid., pp. 94409–10.

> fit upon arrival: trucks often served as both freight and passenger carriers, although some were specially fitted with conventional bus bodies for passenger use. Local bodies had low roofs and the seats had straight backs and were roughly finished. In Beijing alone ten factories specialised in the building of bodies for cars, trucks and buses on imported chassis. Most were made of elm wood on to which iron plates were nailed, the whole being given several coats of varnish with products from Du Pont de Nemours. The interior was finished with lace-bark pine and stuffing for the seats. . . . Compartments were crowded, noisy, full of smoke and very stuffy.[21]

Sitting inside the bus and waiting for departure, He Taisun noticed the weather suddenly changing. The clouds gave way to a scorching sun. Since the roof of the bus was made out of a piece of iron sheet, the temperature in the bus went up quickly. He felt as if he were sitting inside an oven; only after the bus began moving did he feel slightly relieved from the heat. Leaving the terminal, the bus ran at full speed. It crossed a long bridge at Sanggan River and entered an area full of coalmines. The landscape amazed He Taisun, who wrote: "The rugged mountain road only allowed one vehicle to pass. Cliffs stood on both sides of the road, and our bus zigzagged and made the way through this seemingly tough area in a fairly smooth manner."[22] It took about ten minutes to drive through this mountainous area. At last, the bus reached its destination on schedule and stopped right in front of the county government building.

He Taisun's diary, coupled with research work by historians, help us piece together what Yang Hu Shi might have experienced on her trip. If everything went as planned, it would have taken her less than twenty-four hours to complete a journey of 130 kilometers. Her journey was not hassle-free, as women still had to go through security checkpoints, rush to avoid missing travel connections, and sit among strangers (mostly male) in trains and vehicles. New travel rules and the usual hassles of commuting notwithstanding, passenger trains and long-distance bus services offered women (as well as men) fast, relatively reliable, and less exhausting means to travel over a long distance.

21. Dikotter, *Exotic Commodities*, p. 99.
22. He, *Zhangjiakou shixi diaocha riji*, pp. 94424–25.

The Lines

The travel route connecting Beijing and Zhangjiakou was open for traffic in 1909. Instantly, the construction of the railroad was seen as both an awesome feat of engineering and a source of national pride. Unlike most of the railways built in China at the time, which were "funded by loans from foreign countries guaranteed by the railway's assets and operating income,"[23] this railroad relied exclusively on capital investment from the Qing government. A Chinese engineering team headed by American-trained railroad engineer Zhan Tianyou (1861–1919) was given the task of designing the road and overseeing the construction. The line ran more than two hundred kilometers, and in its path it climbed seemingly impassible mountain barriers, bridged canyons, and crossed deserts. Zhan was celebrated particularly for his innovative solution to the gradient problem when crossing the steep mountains west of Beijing. He designed a zigzag line and used two locomotives (one pulling and the other pushing) to help the train move. Finally, the construction was completed two years ahead of schedule, and the construction cost per kilometer was almost 50 percent lower than that of other railroads built at the same period under the supervision of foreign engineering firms. The construction proceeded after reaching Zhangjiakou and extended the rail line westward as scheduled. However, the collapse of the Qing government in 1911 and the ensuing financial crisis of the early Republic period delayed and disrupted the construction schedule. It took another decade to reach Guisui (or Hohhot), an important trade hub on the route connecting Beijing, Mongolia, and Russia.

By the 1940s, three trains per day ran between Beijing and Zhangjiakou. Two departed from Beijing at 7 o'clock and 8 o'clock in the morning respectively, and the last one left Beijing at 9 o'clock in the evening. Trains running back from Zhangjiakou to Beijing arrived in Beijing at 8:27 a.m., 4:39 p.m., and 6:18 p.m.[24] On May 1, 1944, a woman arrived in Beijing in one of these trains. She collected her belongings and followed other passengers into the station lobby. Exiting the terminal and making her way through the crowd, she noticed that a man was

23. Chang Jui-te, "Technology Transfer in Modern China," p. 107.
24. Fei-shi, *Guide to Peking*, "List of Advertisements," III.

following her. Before she made out who he was, he grabbed her arms and began to yell at her. The incident drew the attention of a few police officers who were patrolling the area. They arrested the couple immediately for disorderly conduct.

At the police precinct office, officers found that the woman was twenty-year-old Wu Yue Shi and the man was Wu Dehai, a rickshaw puller who claimed to be her husband. The trouble between the couple lay rooted in a lawsuit initiated in Beijing District Court three years prior, in which Wu Yue Shi sued for a legal divorce on the grounds of spousal abandonment. While waiting for the court's decision, Wu Yue Shi decided to leave Wu Dehai and stay with her natal family. Later she prostituted herself at a third-class brothel in a suburb of Beijing to make a living. There she met a man named Wang Rui, who treated her well and eventually purchased her by paying the brothel a 200 *yuan* "body price." Wu Yue Shi married Wang Rui afterwards and adopted his surname. In 1943 the couple moved to Zhangjiakou. Back in Beijing, even though they were no longer living together, Wu Dehai still considered Wu Yue Shi as his wife and kept looking for her.[25]

It might have been quite accidental for Wu Dehai to encounter his runaway wife on the street in the heart of Beijing, but as a rickshaw puller it was nothing but routine for him to come to the railway station looking for passengers. The Qianmen area, due in large part to its easy access to transportation facilities and travel agencies, had served as an anchor for local commerce. The East Station, where Dehai found his wife, was the main passenger depot and served as the terminal of two key rail lines: the Beijing-Fengtian line to Manchuria and the Beijing-Suiyuan line to the west. Another terminal, the West Station, was built shortly after the East Station in the same area to serve the Beijing-Hankou line to the south. Furthermore, two tram lines (No. 1 and No. 2) and three bus lines (No. 1, No. 3, and No. 5) originated in the Qianmen area.[26] The road system in the area was completely re-routed to relieve traffic congestion and accommodate the large volume of passengers arriving at and leaving from railway stations.

Ever since China's Self-Strengthening Movement in the 1860s, road

25. BPDFFY, J65-8-3895, Wu Yue Shi, 1944.
26. Beijingshi dang'anguan and Zhongguo renmin daxue dang'anxi wenxian bianzuanxue jiaoyanshi, *Beijing dianche gongsi dang'an shiliao*, p. 337.

works had secured the central place in national political discourse. Advocates emphasized that road works were a costly but crucial investment that would open up China's vast natural resources to the growing industrial economy by means of circulating raw materials, commodities, and laborers. Railroads could merge local marketing operations into an integrated national economic system. With all its modern qualities, the road works projects became a rallying point around which new technology, government initiative, and local support collaborated, aiming to strengthen the country and enrich the people. Road works also incited debates, conflicts, and violence. For example, opponents of new railroads emphasized the possible setbacks: unemployed transportation laborers displaced by the new technology, road safety and security, the questionable profitability of a railway enterprise, and the concern that railroad constructions might disturb *fengshui* and people's everyday lives. The fact that most railroad construction projects in modern China borrowed their funds from foreign business syndicates made the situation more complicated; the construction of railroads funded through foreign investment incited nationalistic outcries and ferocious anti-foreign sentiments. Even historians who tend to have a less critical view of imperialism acknowledge that the building of a railroad system in modern China was an "unhappy tale" and that it "came to be the most visible manifestation of the imperialist presence in the Middle Kingdom."[27]

In a way, the Qianmen East Station and its Beijing-Fengtian rail line embody the violent contour and ultimate rise of railroads in modern China. The first section of the railroad was a short ten-kilometer track built by the British Kaiping Coalmine in 1881 for its own production and transportation purposes. The railroad reached Tianjin in 1881, and in 1893 it extended north to Shanhai Pass on the border between north China and Manchuria. Five years later, a short line that connected Tianjin to Beijing's southern suburb was completed. The railroad was severely damaged during the Boxer Uprising in 1900. Peasant rebels removed rails, destroyed locomotives and passenger and freight cars, leveled station buildings, and massacred railroad employees. Then the Allied forces defeated rebels and drove the Qing court into exile. War and anarchy gave the foreign troops free rein to establish a new political

27. Huenemann, *The Dragon and the Iron Horse*, p. 2

order and expand foreign powers' economic interests in north China. The British, as a member of the foreign occupation force, decided to repair the damaged line and extend rail tracks to downtown Beijing. It took another decade to complete all construction works. When it was finally opened to passengers in August 1911, this 1,150-kilometer line (including 2 tunnels, 844 bridges, and more than 70 stops along the route) linked north China to Manchuria for the first time in history.[28]

While the repair and construction of the railroad was underway, the British also decided to build a magnificent station to serve passengers, most of whom were foreigners. They had been attempting to open the imperial capital by means of a modern form of transport for decades. In 1865, a British merchant, R. J. Durante, built a short railroad track just outside the inner city in the hopes that this showpiece work would sell the novel technology to the court and local Chinese people. His ambitious plan ended up an utter failure, as the Qing government ordered him to dismantle his tracks immediately. "It was simply too shocking an innovation," historian Madeleine Yue Dong comments, "and it seemed out of place in the imperial capital, which was accustomed only to the sights and sounds of pedestrians, horse-drawn carts, and the sedan chairs of officials."[29] In the wake of the Boxer War, though, having won a decisive victory over the hostile Chinese bureaucrats, the British were determined to destroy any opposition that stopped the railroad works and to let trains—with their noise, smoke, speed, and motion—redefine the imperial capital's physical and cosmological skyline.

From start to finish, the construction team took five years to build what was then the largest passenger depot in the country. The station was a gigantic rectangular complex, measuring approximately fifty-two meters from north to south and forty meters from east to west. It was composed of three distinct parts: a vast lobby with a vaulted ceiling, two wing buildings housing offices, and a seven-story clock tower. When designing the exterior, the British architect highlighted the complex with a red roof, marble window frames, and a gray façade (see fig. 18). The lobby housed an information counter, a ticket office, a luggage room, telephone booths, bathrooms, telegraph service, and a divided

28. Jingfeng tielu guanliju zongwuchu bianchake, ed. *Jingfeng tielu lüxing zhinan*, pp. 1–2.
29. Madeleine Yue Dong, *Republican Beijing*, p. 35.

FIGURE 18. Qianmen East Station. Photograph by the author.

waiting area that separated first-class passengers from other travelers. From the lobby, passengers would walk down a ramp to three departing train platforms. Besides its imposing presence and its unapologetic Western design features, the station was placed less than one kilometer from the imperial palace, right to the east of the south gate of the imperial city, and immediately off the capital's central axis. Although it did not dwarf the impressive city gate and walls, the station did introduce a new sense of power based on industrial might and thus threatened to reduce the nearby imperial landscape to an exotic oriental tourist scene or, even worse, a symbol of an outdated tradition.

During the time when the Beijing-Fengtian railroad was being built, the total length of the railroad system in China increased from less than 160 kilometers in the 1880s to an impressive 9,600 kilometers in 1911. In north China alone, several branch lines were built in addition to the three main railroads. By 1935, the railways in this region accounted for a total of more than 2,680 kilometers.[30] Passenger trains revolutionized people's traveling experiences. Trains reduced travel

30. Kia-ngau Chang, *China's Struggle for Railroad Development*, pp. 86–87.

time significantly and made the journey more pleasant. Moreover, because "the technical considerations of arrivals and departures on tracks required that trains adhere to their scheduled timetables," as Johanna Ransmeier puts it, railways offered an expedited and efficient service characterized by "an overall sense of orderliness."[31] Furthermore, the transport authority introduced the "connection ticket" (*lianpiao* 聯票). It allowed passengers to make connections or change lines at selected major railway stations (usually city-level stations or important transportation hubs) without additional charge, so long as they traveled within the period specified on the ticket and their final destination remained unchanged.[32]

Women with limited finances who might have had to undertake an arduous journey on foot, or by wagon or on horseback, could now travel by train. They frequently took advantage of favorable policies to decide their schedules and build personalized itineraries. In one case, on March 17, 1945, trains arrived and departed at the Qianmen East Station as scheduled. A northbound passenger train to Fengtian had just completed the boarding process. The railway clerk waved the departure signal and watched the train slowly begin to move forward. Suddenly a woman jumped off the moving train, and seconds later a man followed her. Before they could disappear into the crowd, railway police caught them and took them into custody. The woman was twenty-six-year-old Zhao Zhang Shi. She had married coppersmith Zhao Baoliang in 1936, but their relationship fell apart in March 1944 when her heroin addiction had become a drain on family resources. She was sent back to her natal family. To support her addiction while living apart from her husband, Zhao Zhang Shi placed herself in a "white-powder house" (*baimian fangzi* 白面房子), or "heroin-den," where she practiced prostitution in exchange for food and cash. While there, Zhao Zhang Shi met a man named Wang Shutong. In one of their conversations, Wang Shutong brought up the idea of introducing her to his relative, thirty-two-year-old Wang Wenbin, a worker at a charcoal warehouse. In a short while, Wang Wenbin redeemed her by paying the brothel

31. Ransmeier, "'No Other Choice,'" 198–99. Also see Ding, *Xinshi jiaotong yu shehui bianqian*, pp. 360–413.

32. Jingfeng tielu guanliju zongwuchu bianchake, *Jingfeng tielu lüxing zhinan*, pp. 73–74.

more than a thousand *yuan* and planned to take her to his hometown at Ji County, in Hebei Province, where he would marry her.[33]

From Beijing to Ji County there were two travel options: one was to follow the southbound Beijing-Hankou line to Shijiazhuang and connect onto a long-distance bus; the other was to take the Beijing-Fengtian line to Tianjin and switch to the Tianjin-Pukou line to the stop at De County, where they could take a short bus trip to Wang Wenbin's hometown. They chose the second itinerary. The choice required them to transfer lines, but they likely favored it because it allowed them to stay on the train longer, as it moved faster and thus saved them time. Moreover, they purchased connection tickets that allowed them to switch lines easily at no additional cost. Wang Wenbin's plan initially worked well, and Zhao Zhang Shi followed him and boarded the train. However, as the train was about to leave the station, Zhao Zhang Shi changed her mind and jumped off the train in an attempt to escape from her new partner.

Criminal cases suggest that trains quickly became a popular way for women and men to travel over long distances and for extended periods of time. According to American wartime intelligence, by the 1940s, the three main railroads combined (Beijing-Fengtian, Beijing-Suiyuan, and Beijing-Hankou) connected Beijing to 256 destinations in seven provinces across north China (see fig. 19).[34] The technological breakthrough provided women with new and faster "means" to claim public space and explore regional geography. But there were unintended consequences of the technological breakthrough when modern forms of transport began to reshape the pattern of personal travel and local economic rhythm. On the one hand, railroads "reduced the political and cultural alienation of distance, erased natural barriers and the historic insularity they nurtured, and made possible, for the first time, the creation of a 'national village.' "[35] On the other hand, not every community, township, and city in the regions where railroads were built equally benefited from the flow of people, cargo, and capital. Commercial and transport activities were concentrated in a few locations where the train stopped, and this created

33. BPDFFY, J65-9-861, Wang Wenbin and Zhao Zhang Shi, 1945.
34. National Archives and Records Administration, YK-5674, "Political and Economic Report on North China," Office of Strategic Service, China Theater, July 11, 1945.
35. Elleman et al., "Introduction," p. 7.

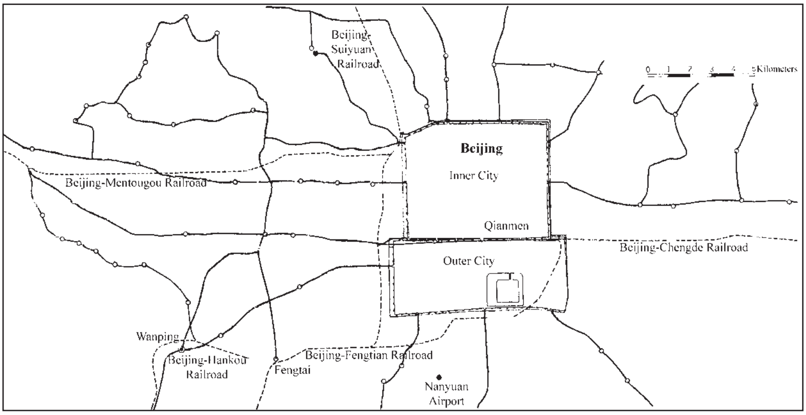

Figure 19. Railroads and Major Roads in and around Beijing. Map adapted from Zhang Qijun, ed., *Zhonghua minguo dituji* (Atlas of the Republic of China). Yangmingshan: Guofang yanjiuyuan, 1961, p. 21.

a new hierarchy by "encourag[ing] the distribution of some goods while discouraging others, direct[ing] flows to certain areas and away from others, or selectively favor[ing] certain trade routes, market towns, and manufacturing centers."[36] For many individuals, the practical problem was how to access train service from departure or arrival points that were farther away from the main rail line. Furthermore, they would also have to learn how to travel in the midst of wartime conflicts and economic distress.

Roads in Peace and War

Although railroad construction was the principal public works investment of the early twentieth century, beginning in the late Qing the Chinese government committed a portion of its public works funds to building modern roads passable for motor vehicles. Inside cities, macadam roads became the signature type of road construction; this "modernist project" of building new roads characterizes the early twentieth-century

36. Elleman et al., "Introduction," p. 5. See also Köll, "Chinese Railroads."

urban administrative reform that swept through China.[37] In Beijing, the imperial government created the Bureau of Road Construction and Patrol (Gongxunju 工巡局) to supervise road works. Under the new administration, streets were built of macadam and cement pavement and divided into three lanes separating pedestrians from light and heavy vehicles. Construction workers also planted trees to shield people from the summer heat and erected light poles to illuminate the roads at night. Businesses were forbidden to take up space on the roads, and policemen patrolled back and forth to enforce the regulations.[38] Municipal governments in other cities such as Shanghai, Suzhou, and Chengdu, to name a few, also tore down city walls and widened and paved streets to relieve the city from choking traffic.[39] Road works embodied what urban administrators conceived of as the spirit of an orderly, productive, and progressive city and helped to translate the illusive ideal of modernity into something visible and memorable to urban residents.

Outside city walls, road works initially focused on repairing existing (albeit deteriorating) roads and later proceeded with building new ones. The early Republican government put forward an ambitious plan. The national network they envisioned consisted of four different types of roads: (1) "national expressways" (*guodao* 國道, 17 meters wide) connecting Beijing to provincial capitals; (2) "provincial highways" (*shengdao* 省道, 10 meters wide) running between provincial capitals, port cities, and important military outposts; (3) "county roads" (*xiandao* 縣道, 8 meters wide) linking county seats to mines, commercial centers, railway stations, and ports; and (4) "village roads" (*lidao* 里道) connecting communities in the countryside.[40] Such a blueprint also demanded that all local governments finance road building and maintenance. Between 1912 and 1928, the Beijing Municipal Government built fifteen modern roads totaling 470 kilometers.[41] By 1927, immediately before the GMD took over Beijing, the modern roads in today's Hebei Province totaled

37. Esherick, "Modernity and Nation in the Chinese City."
38. Shikoku chutongun shileibu, *Qingmo Beijingzhi ziliao*, p. 21.
39. Madeleine Yue Dong, *Republican Beijing*; Carroll, *Between Heaven and Modernity*; Di Wang, *Street Culture in Chengdu*.
40. "Xiuzhi daolu tiaoli" [Regulations over road construction and repair], November 14, 1919; from Hebeisheng jiaotongting shizhi bianzuan weiyuanhui, *Hebei gonglushi*, p. 116.
41. Qi and Yuan, *Lao Beijing de chuxing*, p. 98.

over 2,000 kilometers; and the number grew to 6,586 kilometers in 1937 in the wake of the Japanese invasion and 7,592 kilometers in 1945 before the Civil War began.[42]

Road improvements and the availability of remodeled vehicles made long-distance bussing a burgeoning and profitable business. The first private-run long-distance bus company in Beijing was founded in 1919, the same year the government unveiled its road plan. The company owned sixteen vehicles and operated one service line between the city and a neighboring county. The number of passengers grew steadily, and so did the company's profit. Competition grew when five more companies were founded. By late 1928, the official survey reported that there were thirty-four companies and more than sixty buses operating on three major roads in the Beijing area.[43] Many companies experienced a setback in the mid-1930s that was due, in large part, to the tense political circumstances. The Japanese army frequently clashed with Chinese troops and thus threw the region into chaos. Chinese mobs, with Japanese support, also challenged the government's authority and threatened law and order. Regular passenger service was often disrupted as a result. The demand for travel service plunged as people cancelled their travel plans because of concerns about road safety. To make matters worse, troops, Chinese and Japanese alike, constantly interrupted regular bus service by forcing commercial vehicles to transport military supplies. But once the occupational authority restored peace and reintegrated the war-torn area under one political order, the long-distance bus business rebounded quickly. By late 1937 the number of long-distance buses in service grew to ninety-one and the number of bus lines increased to thirteen.[44]

The public transport system allowed people the freedom to move around fairly quickly at a reasonable cost and offered them the flexibility to alternate between train and bus services to reach their destinations. The following experience of a young girl provides an example. Li Dani lived in a small village in Wei County in south Hebei Province in 1944. At just eleven years old, she was already familiar with economic hard-

42. This includes eastern Chahar Province, southern Rehe Province, and Hebei Province in the Republican period. Hebeisheng jiaotongting shizhi bianzuan weiyuanhui, *Hebei gonglushi*, pp. 118–59, 198.

43. Qi and Yuan, *Lao Beijing de chuxing*, p. 182.

44. Ibid.

ships and family tragedies. Her father had died of an illness in 1943 and left the burden of raising her and her younger brother to their mother. Li Dani's mother, like many parents caught up in financial troubles, thought of selling her daughter as a child bride. She calculated that the food saved could feed her son and the betrothal gift would provide the family further monetary relief. Soon afterwards she learned that a woman from her village surnamed Zhang was hosting a male friend, twenty-six-year-old Wang Shulin, from Beijing. Hoping to get his help, Li Dani's mother spoke to Zhang and Wang Shulin about her situation and plan. He agreed to help.[45]

Wei County is located at the southern tip of Hebei Province, closer to Shandong Province (to its east) and to Henan Province (further south) than to its own provincial capital. To make the journey from Wei County to Beijing, a distance of 400 kilometers, Wang Shulin and Li Dani could choose one of the three travel options: they could head north to Nangong County and then follow the provincial highway north to Beijing; or they could travel northeast and cross the provincial border into De County at Shandong Province, and from there catch a northward train to Beijing; or they could go west to Xingtai City and catch the Beijing-Hankou railway north to their destination. Wang Shulin chose the third itinerary. On the morning of January 24, 1944, he took Li Dani and boarded the long-distance bus bound for Xingtai.

The bus company in service was initially founded in 1932 by a local wealthy merchant named Wang Heling. When he inaugurated the bus service, his company owned one used vehicle worth 8,000 silver dollars and hired drivers from Tianjin. The business exploded in early 1937 when a modern highway linking Beijing to Daming (an important commercial center on Hebei's southern border) was built. Running from north to south, the highway was 490 kilometers long, with 60 bridges and 300 culverts, and cost the government about 1.7 million *fabi*.[46] Road projects like the Beijing-Daming highway grew bus service that connected people and cargo to the regional railroad system and train service. The increased connectivity also meant that when people traveled over longer distances, using multiple means of conveyance was a fairly common practice. Such transportation networks in north

45. BPDDFY, J65-8-1035, Wang Shulin, 1944.
46. Weixian jiaotongju, *Weixian gonglu jiaotongshi*, pp. 13–14.

China allowed people to travel from Beijing to nearly anywhere in the surrounding region in more or less one day. Transportation improvements enhanced women's mobility and brought convenience to their everyday lives, but they also expanded criminal accessibility to places that runaway wives and women traffickers had previously found difficult to reach.

While women and men were taking advantage of trains and buses for legal and illegal purposes, political leaders and military commanders were evaluating the strategic significance of roads in war and administration. Transportation facilities became an important resource during times of combat. According to Chang Kia-ngau, Minister of Communications for the GMD's wartime cabinet, the railroad moved about 4.5 million troops and 1.2 million tons of military supplies for the Chinese defense force during the first five months of the Sino-Japanese War. When they were forced to retreat, the Chinese army destroyed bridges, buried heavy locomotives in the tunnels to block traffic, and moved train cars to the GMD-controlled area to the effect of staving off advancing Japanese troops. These efforts might have slowed down the invasion but did not defeat enemies. By September 1938, when Wuhan in central China fell into Japanese hands, the GMD had lost more than four-fifths of the railroads built before the war.

Once the major fighting ended, the Japanese began road works to repair damaged tracks and build new lines.[47] Chinese guerrillas therefore focused on sabotaging transportation facilities. They destroyed stretches of railroad tracks, blew up roads and bridges, and ambushed enemy troops along transportation lines. John Seymour Letcher, an American Marine captain who was stationed in Beijing from 1937 to 1939, wrote several times in his diary about guerrillas and their successful attacks on railroads in the region: "The Chinese guerrillas are all around Peking and are doing a good job of cutting the railroads." He continued, "They were out today between here and Tientsin (Tianjin) in several places and only one train made the trip today in place of the usual half dozen."[48]

47. Kia-ngau Chang, *China's Struggle for Railroad Development*, pp. 193–97 and 323.
48. Letcher, *Good-bye to Old Peking*, p. 105.

Even though guerrilla sabotage was the dominant narrative of the history of wartime transportation, this kind of constant but small-scale military harassment strategy never completely blocked off the flow of traffic. Behind the heroic accounts of attacks on railroads was the consistent and effective work to rebuild roads. The very railroad mentioned in Letcher's diary in the beginning of the Sino-Japanese War, as the American war intelligence concluded in 1945, "is busily engaged in shipping supplies and materials to Manchuria."[49] Only during the very final stage of the war, since early 1945, had the Allies been able to cause extensive and severe damage to communication facilities in north China. The American intelligence, for example, noted:

> As a result of extensive bombing by the Allies, the total number of the locomotives operating in North China has been reduced to 147 at present and all the trains operate at night only. . . . The railway schedules were revised on April 1st, 1945, thereby greatly reducing the train services, sharply putting down the tonnage and making it more difficult for civilian passengers to secure train passages.[50]

Both the Japanese army and the Chinese collaborationist government "increase[d] their patrols on both sides of the railroad lines" and "built trenches over 20 feet deep with pillboxes for sentinels at intervals of 3 to 6 miles."[51] In areas where the railroad cut through farmlands, the authorities "limited the height of crops along the tracks and major roads so as to minimize the danger of ambush by guerilla fighters hiding in the fields."[52] Peasants were forced to "form more than 8,000 of the so-called "Road Caretaking Villages" (*ailu cun* 愛路村) along the railways and highways in North China," and an estimated twenty million peasants were marshaled to road works.[53] To further ensure

49. National Archives and Records Administration, YK-5674, "Political and Economic Report on North China," Office of Strategic Service, China Theater, July 11, 1945.
50. Ibid.
51. Kia-ngau Chang, *China's Struggle for Railroad Development*, p. 326.
52. Köll, "Chinese Railroads," p. 139.
53. National Archives and Records Administration, YK-5674, "Political and Economic Report on North China."

travel safety and road security, the authorities placed local peasants under the mutual surveillance system "whereby they are ruthlessly punished if anyone in that village harbors a member of a guerrilla band or assists in sabotage of the railroad." [54] Besides these punitive measures, the Japanese also attempted to win the loyalty of its Chinese workforce by offering them better working conditions and benefits. As a result, the Communists "found it more difficult to infiltrate the workforce and harder to convince the skilled workers to sabotage their own work in the name of anti-Japanese resistance." [55]

In addition to military measures, the Japanese also managed to take over Chinese private bus companies, which would further enhance the occupational authority's capability to enforce travel bans, curb black market trading, and fend off guerrilla activities. Taking Wang Helin's bus company in Wei County as an example, the Japanese army occupied his county on October 14, 1937. In the following months, Wang found himself a victim of the Chinese police chief's extortion and his Japanese competitor's blackmail. He finally abandoned his business and left the county. His company was taken over by the Japanese-controlled Shunde Auto Co. The new company manager, two of the four customer service representatives, one of the three administrators, one-third of the bus drivers, and half of the mechanical team were Japanese. The newly configured company inaugurated its service with ten vehicles operating on four passenger routes. At its peak, it maintained a team of seventy vehicles serving passengers as well as acting as an army postal service.[56] When traveling over short distances between neighboring counties, one passenger bus often teamed up with a truck hauling freight. Over long distances, five to twenty buses were grouped together as a convoy and escorted by army vehicles to ensure passengers' safety and security on the road.[57]

54. Kia-ngau Chang, *China's Struggle for Railroad Development*, p. 326.
55. Köll, "Chinese Railroads," p. 139.
56. Weixian jiaotongju, *Weixian gonglu jiaotongshi*, pp. 13–14.
57. Xingtai diqu gonglu yunshushi bianzuan weiyuanhui, *Xingtai diqu gonglu yunshushi*, pp. 39–40.

"Investing" in Crime

How many people traveled along the railroads and highways under the Japanese occupation? How many people were able to afford passenger train or long-distance bus tickets? As to the first question of accessibility, historians might never be able to quantify the wartime traffic, though one piece of American intelligence estimated that in 1944 alone, the highway system in north China carried 9,300,000 passengers and 320,000 tons of freights.[58] On the second question of affordability, some historians have provided estimates. Based on a study of passenger transport patterns along the Tianjin-Pukou railroad in the 1940s, Elisabeth Köll finds that riding in a first-class car from Beijing to Shanghai would have cost a Chinese railroad employee his full monthly salary; a second-class ticket would have cost him one-third of his monthly salary. The third-class car was more affordable to "the urban petty bourgeoisie, shopkeepers, teachers, or clerks if they saved up for the trip." "Train travel for people for lower income groups," Köll concludes, "was not inexpensive."[59]

Criminal case files suggest that financial concerns did not keep women and men off the roads and railways, though. People traveled for practical reasons and oftentimes under pressing circumstances, such as to escape from an abusive family environment or a depressing marital relationship, or simply to seek a better livelihood. There were also people who explored opportunities to pursue material gains to offset the costs of travel and even to make a profit. To them, travel expense became a form of capital investment with the possibility, real or illusive, to bring in profit eventually. Legal records show that women and men traveled from place to place buying and selling illegal commodities including staple foods, controlled substances, and even human beings.

In 1942, it cost 4.5 *yuan* to buy a third-class one-way train ticket from Beijing to Gubeikou Township, an important crossing point and commercial depot located in the foothills of the Great Wall north of Beijing. On October 31, a fifteen-year-old girl named Ren Yinzi held such a ticket and boarded the train at Qianmen East Station. She also

58. National Archives and Records Administration, YK-5674, "Political and Economic and Report on North China."
59. Köll, "Chinese Railroads," p. 138.

held tightly in her hand a scrap of paper bearing an address and a man's name—"No. 7, Yi Avenue in Gubeikou Township, Cai Liancang." The man and the place were to become the next stop for Ren Yinzi in her quite eventful life. Living an unsettled lifestyle and traveling over long distances were nothing new to her. At the age of seven, she had accompanied her father, a bankrupt farmer, when he left their hometown in Zaoqiang County in Hebei Province and made his way to Beijing. While in the city, her father sold her to a woman, Ren Zhao Shi. We know neither the particulars of this transaction nor Ren Zhao Shi's motive to buy Ren Yinzi as her adopted daughter (she already had a daughter of her own). There seems to be a great likelihood that Ren Zhao Shi was acquiring the young girl as an asset and preparing to resell her at a higher price later, once she grew up into a young woman.

Time flew by. In 1942, when Ren Yinzi turned fourteen, Ren Zhao Shi began thinking of having her practice prostitution at home.[60] Meanwhile, Ren Zhao Shi was busy selling used books at Dong'an Market in the Inner-2 District. To save time on commuting, she rented a room near her business and left Ren Yinzi and her own daughter to stay at home in the Outer-5 District by themselves. Ren Yinzi knew that if she continued to stay with Ren Zhao Shi, sooner or later she would have to become a prostitute. She refused to take that life path and sought help from a neighbor, fifty-two-year-old An Zhang Shi. The neighbor proposed to help her run away from home and arranged to get her to Gubeikou Township, where An Zhang Shi's married daughter could find her a husband. Ren Yinzi agreed. As planned, she fled her home on the evening of October 30 and hid herself at An Zhang Shi's home overnight. The next day, An Zhang Shi's son accompanied her to the railway station, bought a ticket for her, and walked away after the train departed.

The money that Ren Yinzi borrowed from An Zhang Shi to buy a train ticket could purchase ten *jin* of second-degree wheat flour, not a small sum by any account.[61] When escaping her adopted mother, Ren Yinzi took with her three cotton-padded coats, three pairs of pants, two bed sheets, four quilts, and one pair of shoes; and she left them all to An

60. BPDFFY, J65-6-5571, An Zhang Shi, 1942.
61. BPSSHJ, J2-7-696, "Linian mianfen jiage" [Year-by-year price of wheat flour], 1945.

Zhang Shi. It seems from case files that these were all that An Zhang Shi was able to get from Ren Yinzi in return for the travel arrangements. Surely An Zhang Shi could take this clothing and bedding to pawn shops for cash; but the return was still quite modest. It is very likely that she had expected to make more cash and would have done it if the elopement and marriage plan had worked out as arranged. However, the plan began to fall apart shortly after Ren Yinzi left Beijing. Her adopted mother Ren Zhao Shi had apparently kept an eye on Ren Yinzi, perhaps with her own daughter's help, when she noticed the unusually close relationship between Ren Yinzi and An Zhang Shi. Therefore, once she found her missing, Ren Zhao Shi immediately notified the police and took officers directly to An Zhang Shi's home. The police investigation eventually led to the arrest of An Zhang Shi and her son for abducting Ren Yinzi.

In another case, the financial aspects of a woman's elopement become clearer. On May 30, 1943, three women and one man stood trial for abduction in Beijing District Court. One of them was a forty-two-year-old woman, Wang Chang Shi. She was a domestic servant working in a Japanese household. She had a daughter, Chang Fuying, who married a cobbler. Chang Fuying often returned to her natal family and complained to her mother about the hardships of daily life. Thinking of her daughter's dreadful life, Wang Chang Shi approached her friend, fifty-one-year-old He Wang Shi, who regularly traveled between Beijing and Zhangjiakou buying and selling vegetables and staple foods. It seemed to He Wang Shi that Chang Fuying did not have any particular skill that qualified her to take any professional job, nor did she have money herself to start a business. She suggested to Wang Chang Shi that her daughter use her body to find a way out of her marriage. The plan was to arrange for Chang Fuying to travel to Zhangjiakou and prostitute herself at a brothel for a fixed amount of time. In early April of 1943, not telling Chang Fuying's husband, He Wang Shi and her two friends helped her run off. They together contributed 50 *yuan* to cover her travel; and once Chang Fuying arrived at the brothel in Zhangjiakou, she signed a contract which stipulated that she would stay there for a fixed term of five years. She was given 450 *yuan* in cash as an advance payment. Chang Fuying kept 150 *yuan* for herself; the rest not only defrayed the travel expense but also gave He Wang Shi and her friends a net gain of 250 *yuan*.[62]

62. BPDFFY, J65-7-12467, He Wang Shi and Zhang Zhang Shi, 1942.

The above two cases demonstrate that a runaway woman needed assistance finding a new husband, creating a new relationship, locating a host family, or, in some cases, obtaining employment in a brothel. In all these scenarios, women needed help to ensure a smooth transition from one relationship to another, from one family to another, and from one place to another—figuring out travel routes, train schedules, places of temporary shelter, and how to obtain train and bus tickets. There were always people who readily offered such services. Many people had developed, to borrow Johanna Ransmeier's terms, "an adequate sense of geography," a more accurate estimate of traveling times and distances, and a better knowledge of the gains and risks involved in legal and illegal transactions.[63] They were quite willing to cover a runaway woman's travel expenses, and they viewed it as a form of advance payment that would guarantee bigger profits later.

The Market for Women

It seems from the two cases cited above that women involved in criminal trials in wartime Beijing located their livelihood in three sources: productive labor, reproductive labor, and sexual labor. These three forms of labor had traditionally been configured within the institution of family and marriage. In late imperial China, for example, by doing farm labor in the family plot, and more importantly and commonly by participating in the home-based handicraft production, or simply by doing housework, women's productive labor was conscripted to the effect of strengthening the household economy. Women's reproductive labor created the crucial resource—the human resource, which reproduced the necessary biological and economic conditions for family to continue the production process. With regard to sexual labor, the imperial social mores and sex laws defined sex as "a heterosexual intercourse" that "took place within the legitimate marriage."[64] Hailing proper sexual behavior as the foundation of social and moral order, the imperial government promoted the chastity cult to reward women and

63. Ransmeier, "'No Other Choice,'" p. 189.
64. Sommer, *Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China*. p. 34.

men who subscribed to the sexual normative; it also took bold measures, such as the rigid rape laws and infamous anti–rogue male campaign in the eighteenth century, to punish deviant behaviors and whoever posed a threat to the integrity of family and marriage.[65]

The social and legal reform since the late Qing claimed to dislodge the family from its underlying traditional values such as female chastity, gender segregation, and parental authority; likewise, the same reform movement sought to undermine the family's monopoly over the meaning and value of women's productive, reproductive, and sexual labors. Yet, historians have argued that the reform effort changed neither the reality of family operating as the basic unit of economic production in China's pre-industrial economy, nor the conception of the family as an anchor of social order in a society torn apart by political turmoil and socioeconomic changes. Susan Glosser, for instance, points out that the May Fourth radicals "no longer believed the traditional joint family capable of ordering society, but still assumed that societal order began with the family."[66] The *xiao jiating*, or conjugal family ideal, passionately supported by political leaders, social reformers, and the business community, celebrated family as both "a refuge from a harsh world" and "a training ground for national struggle."[67] In sum, although they configured family differently, government officials and social leaders in Qing and Republican China revered and depended on the family as the primary institution for guarding social order and promoting proper manhood and womanhood in the Qing and citizenhood in Republican China.

Despite the importance of family in the official discourse of morality, criminal case files illustrate that there were always people attempting to define the meaning and exploit the value of women's labors outside the family setting. As Matthew Sommer finds in his study of polyandrous practices at the lower levels of society during the Qing dynasty, families, especially those that lived on the social and economic margins, regarded a "wife's body" as a family asset that, if necessary, could be traded for food and other basic necessities.[68] Two main factors

65. Ng, "Ideology and Sexuality"; Sommer, *Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China*; Theiss, *Disgraceful Matters.*
66. Glosser, *Chinese Visions of Family and State*, p. 10.
67. Ibid., p. 4.
68. Sommer, "Making Sex Work," p. 33.

that contributed to the polyandrous practices in late imperial China—"the skewed sex ratio" and poverty (which deprived men at the bottom of the society of the opportunity to marry)—did not ameliorate in the Republican period.[69] The sex ratio in Beijing was chronically imbalanced in all city districts (see tables 5.1 and 5.2) throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Men consistently outnumbered women by 60 to 70 percent. In some districts where businesses and government agencies were concentrated, the percentage could be upwards of 200 percent. Marriage rates were low; half the male population at marriageable age was single.[70] Such a demographic structure demanded and accommodated a spectrum of arrangements. Some were legitimate relationships: lawful marriages promised financial security and provided women a way to settle down and start a family; men with modest financial abilities sought to marry widows for their reproductive capacity, hoping to produce a male heir. Others were outside the conventional family setting: actresses, prostitutes, and women under economic duress often entered into concubinage; runaway wives cohabited with and even married their new partners; and struggling families could sell their underage girls as child brides in exchange for food or better living conditions; finally, prostitution involved a fairly straightforward transaction that commercialized women's bodies.

Police records and criminal case files bring to light the fact that women's productive, reproductive, and sexual labors were always in demand in pre-war and wartime Beijing. Such sustained demand grew networks, services, and arrangements to buy and sell women, and it also developed a visible subculture that permitted people to explore the value of women's labor outside the conventional family setting. Options made possible by the market, such as remarriage, concubinege, bigamy, elopement, cohabitation, and prostitution, were particular kinds of choices presented by the hardship of everyday life. These choices often compromised the respectability and sexual honors of the family; but women in dire circumstances might find them, as well as the market and the subculture, helpful rather than offensive. For one reason, by choosing any pathway listed above, a woman might be able to raise herself out of the imminent danger of poverty or an intolerable relationship. Moreover,

69. Ibid., p. 32.
70. Han Guanghui, *Beijing lishi renkou dili*, pp. 283–85.

Table 5.1
Sex Ratio in Beijing, 1912–36 (by year)

Year	Male	Female	Number of males per 100 females
1912	468,789	256,346	183
1913	414,728	253,675	163
1914	497,527	271,790	183
1915	507,156	281,967	180
1916	515,568	285,568	181
1917	515,535	296,021	174
1918	505,753	292,642	173
1919	523,561	302,970	173
1920	531,060	318,494	167
1921	541,063	322,146	168
1922	530,242	311,703	170
1923	544,944	302,163	180
1924	550,895	321,681	171
1925	775,116	491,032	158
1926	738,095	486,319	152
1927	794,994	522,740	152
1928	823,543	535,087	154
1929	834,947	535,097	156
1930	847,418	536,455	158
1931	872,436	546,663	160
1932	924,146	576,035	160
1933	939,713	574,874	163
1934	937,987	585,053	160
1935	964,115	601,754	160
1936	943,429	589,654	160

Source: ZQ 12-2-132, Beipingshi zhengfu jingchaju (Police Department of Beijing Municipal Government), "Zi Minguo yuannian lai hukou tongjibiao" (Population statistics since the first year of the Republic), September 1937.

Table 5.2
Sex Ratio in Beijing, 1945 (by district)

District	Male	Female	Number of males per 100 females
Inner-1	78,981	44,601	177
Inner-2	69,987	50,597	138
Inner-3	81,853	54,712	150
Inner-4	73,169	58,852	124
Inner-5	53,332	44,759	119
Inner-6	34,522	30,249	114
Inner-7	1,889	549	344
Outer-1	55,049	20,830	264
Outer-2	63,160	34,920	181
Outer-3	70,370	41,522	169
Outer-4	71,575	48,081	149
Outer-5	71,723	45,242	159

Source: ZQ 12-2-295, Beipingshi zhengfu tongjishi (Office of statistics of Beijing Municipal Government), "Beipingshi tongji zong baogao" (General statistics of Beijing), 1945.

the market and subculture of buying and selling women did not reject the essential meaning of family as the ultimate financial safety net and anchor of the emotional relationship. Instead, they offered a possibility for woman to live temporarily outside the family setting without becoming an absolute social outcast; and they created a larger surrogate family participated in by friends, neighbors, and matchmakers who could potentially channel woman into a new family and marriage, or a more stable relationship. Therefore, the subculture of buying and selling women, as "a reasonably benign component of a more general culture,"[71] did not totally oppose the dominant family values but reinterpreted them to accommodate women's survival tactics in time of hardship.

Johanna Ransmeier's works show some new developments of the market in the early Republican period. There was a multi-directional flow of people: some traveled from the countryside to the city, from the periphery to the center; others chose to travel in the opposite direction

71. Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor*, p. 12.

in search of more opportunities. Many criminal enterprises took advantage of the improved transportation network, in particular railroads, to expand beyond regional boundaries; and this gave rise to a trans-regional market for women.[72] The market continued to operate under the Japanese occupation. Criminal case files in this period demonstrated that the war changed neither the chronic sex-ratio imbalance in local populations nor the social customs that commodified women's bodies. Additionally, the booming sex trade in occupied Beijing demanded women's sexual services and reproductive labors, which propelled the human trafficking enterprise from the pre-war years.

Driven by such constant demand and facilitated by various modern forms of transport, criminal enterprises were set into motion and thrived during this time. Buying and selling women had become an organized, sophisticated, and professionalized criminal enterprise; and its operation extended beyond a local or even regional scale. Among the wide range of methods that abductors used to control their victims—deception, violence, or threat of violence—the most simple and effective way was to move victims to a place far away from their family and home. Distance created opportunities and reduced the risks for abductors.[73] In one typical case, in March 1943 a thirty-five-year-old woman named Xu Gao Shi plotted to take sixteen-year-old Tang Xiaolong out of Beijing and sell her to a brothel. Tang Xiaolong's father had died when she was ten years old, and her mother had lost her sight. Living under the crushing weight of poverty, she came to know Xu Gao Shi as they occasionally went begging in the Tianqiao area together. One day, Xu Gao Shi told the teenage girl that she could take her along on a trip to smuggle millet from Zhangjiakou. Since the municipal authority had just launched a full-scale ration program that made major staples almost unavailable on the retail market, smuggling millet would bring in a tidy profit. Tang Xiaolong agreed. Xu Gao Shi said that this was an urgent matter, and they must leave Beijing immediately. Although the passenger train serving Zhangjiakou departed from Qianmen East Station, Xu Gao Shi took Tang Xiaolong to another station midway and entrusted her to another old woman surnamed Zhao, who had another teenage girl traveling with her. Tang Xiaolong was told to call this woman Aunt Zhao

72. Ransmeier, "A Geography of Crime."
73. Ransmeier, " 'No Other Choice,' " p. 184.

during the duration of the journey. Before they arrived at Zhangjiakou, Zhao led the two teenage girls to get off the train at Xuanhua County and check in at an inn. Shortly afterwards, Tang Xiaolong overheard a conversation in which Zhao revealed the plan to sell her to a brothel. She was terrified and panicked but did not do anything until later that night, when the people watching her fell asleep. She snuck out and found her way back to the railway station. While at the station, Tang Xiaolong broke down in tears after finding herself unable to afford a train ticket. Two passengers came to her rescue and alerted the police.[74]

Tang Xiaolong's story and police records showcase some basic techniques that human traffickers used to cover up their criminal schemes. First, the trafficker would pretend to be the victim's family member. Second, they never traveled in a big group, and members of the group boarded the train at different stations to avoid attracting the police's attention. Third, long trips were divided into multiple short parts; the members of the group first traveled to the nearest station from Beijing on a single ticket; if everything went well, another ticket was purchased to complete the journey. Fourth, group members rode in a rickshaw to a train station somewhere between Beijing and the final destination, and then caught the train to complete the journey. Last of all, group members sat in separate railroad cars while on board the train.[75]

In another case, police officers intercepted a young woman at Qianmen East Station on July 4, 1942. After she was taken to the local police precinct office, she reported that her name was Yu Siguan, sixteen years old, a Jiangsu native and a victim of abduction. Yu Siguan's home was in Suzhou, where her family operated a teahouse. On June 22, her mother's friend Fan Guo Shi showed up at her home with a man named Ma Jiling, whom the family had never met before. They persuaded Yu Siguan's mother to let them take her to Beijing for a trip, and her mother agreed. After traveling by train for two days, the three of them arrived in Beijing. Fan Guo Shi and Ma Jiling brought the teenage girl to one of their friends' homes and kept her there for four days. Then Fan Guo Shi moved her to a hotel, and they stayed there overnight. The next day, Fan Guo Shi sold her to a man named Tian Yuancai for 1,000 *yuan*. It seems that Yu Siguan knew nothing about the forthcoming transac-

74. BPDFFY, J65-7-11586, Xu Gao Shi, 1943.
75. Zhou Shuzhao, "Beiping youguai de yanjiu," p. 145.

tion until Fan Guo Shi and Ma Jiling put twenty-five *yuan* in her hand and left. Tian Yuancai then told her that he owned her and that, to pay off her body price (*shenjia* 身價), she must work as a prostitute. Tian Yuancai and his wife confined Yu Siguan to their home for three days. She stayed quiet, but beneath the surface obedience, she was looking for an opportunity to escape. The moment finally came around 3 o'clock on the afternoon of July 4, when Tian Yuancai was playing mahjong with his friends and his wife was taking a nap. With no one watching her, Yu Siguan fled and rushed to the railway station to catch a train back home.[76]

In both of these cases, the victims were unmarried teenage girls. This reaffirms the findings of sociologist Zhou Shuzhao, who studied the common but infamous crime of abduction in early twentieth-century Beijing. Zhou began her research by examining materials from the "crime columns" of major local newspapers and inmate rosters kept by prisons. After obtaining permission from the prison administration, she proceeded to interview the female inmates and hoped to explore the inner world of the criminal enterprise in the criminals' own words.[77] Among 325 victims that Zhou identified through her interviews, 97.54 percent were women or girls. The most vulnerable group consisted of women who were single, aged between fifteen and twenty, uneducated, and unemployed. The majority of these victims were sold to brothels after being abducted, according to Zhou's study.[78]

The Police Department maintained a record to keep track of the brothel houses and the prostitutes' personal information. Their case files demonstrate the various origins and classes of prostitutes. Yu Siguan's case, discussed above, provides an insight into the geographic distribution of the practice of prostitution. Her hometown, Suzhou, was regarded as the quintessence of the sophistication and wealth of imperial China at a time when paintings and poetry, literary creativity, and haute cuisine were celebrated, and decadent parties and trips were commonplace. Women from Suzhou were said to epitomize feminine beauty; the courtesans of Suzhou were also famous throughout the country. The city retained its culture of beauty and remained an

76. BPDFFY, J65-6-2309, Fan Guo Shi and Ma Jiling, 1942.
77. Zhou Shuzhao, "Beiping youguai de yanjiu," p. 5.
78. Ibid.

emblem of femininity in the early twentieth century. Gail Hershatter notes the "Suzhou hegemony" in the world of prostitution of early twentieth-century Shanghai. The upper-class prostitutes came mainly from Suzhou and other Jiangnan cities, and Suzhou dialect became the official language of the upscale brothels.[79] In Beijing, women from the south, particularly the Suzhou natives, controlled the top-class brothel businesses. One foreign observer wrote:

> Peking girls are not very much successful in this respect because they lack the physical qualities required from a good dancer, being naturally slow and shy. Therefore managers of fashionable dancing halls hire dancing girls from Shanghai, the Soochow (Suzhou) girls . . . who are believed to be the most beautiful girls in China.[80]

In lower-class houses, two-thirds of the prostitutes came from the local area around Beijing. The largest non-native prostitute cohort came from Hebei Province, where more than 3,000 registered prostitutes worked in licensed brothels in 1912.[81] The number of prostitutes increased by 30 percent in less than a decade and remained stable until the Communists took over the city in 1949. The composition of the prostitute population, however, changed in this time period. High-class prostitutes declined almost by half in the period from 1919 to 1929, due primarily to the exodus of the city's wealthy constituents and bureaucrats after the GMD government decided to move the capital south.[82] Lower-class prostitutes stepped in to fill the space left by their "elite" counterparts.

Some people involved in the buying and selling of women were professional traffickers, and they appeared to be innovative, manipulative, knowledgeable, and well-connected. They also accumulated enough knowledge to plan skilled maneuvers to avoid the attention of the police. These qualities helped them build very successful criminal careers. Some abductors also worked in the prostitution industry. In Yu Siguan's case, the woman who abducted her had three daughters from her first marriage, and among them, two worked in Shanghai as

79. Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*, p. 54.
80. I. L. Miller, *The Chinese Girl*, 1932. From Elder, *Old Peking*, p. 123.
81. Mai Qianzeng, "Beiping changji diaocha," p. 493.
82. Ibid.

dancing girls and one was a prostitute working in Beijing. Her relationships with brothel owners and managers, matrons, cooks, janitors, and servants allowed her to develop a better knowledge of women's potential market value as prostitutes. Thus, she could work with kidnappers and traffickers to pick women who would be considered desirable by brothel owners. She chose Yu Siguan not only because the girl came from Suzhou, but also because she had completed her elementary school education and could speak Mandarin fluently, which would certainly raise her market value.

As a central location that saw a steady flow of people coming and going, Beijing was not just on the receiving end of such criminal enterprises; it also played a vital role as a transitional, or in Elizabeth Sinn's term, an "in-between" place. Sinn characterizes the "in-between place" as a locality where transport facilities and travel services were concentrated and where "travel was relatively open, free, and safe."[83] Beijing offered a range of services—from easy access to passenger transport to an elaborate system of lodging facilities—so that both women and men could easily cross geographic and administrative boundaries to exploit market demand. Over time, traffickers expanded their criminal networks and familiarized themselves with the geographical terrain and the trafficking routes. Crime statistics describe the scale of the human trafficking enterprise. More than half of female victims (54.23 percent) were sold to places outside of the Beijing metropolitan area and even outside of Hebei Province, according to Zhou Zhuzhao's study. The main destinations included Liaoning, Jilin, Shandong, Chahar, and Suiyuan.[84] There was a trans-regional network of routes that transported women to various centers of sexual industry across north China.

Smuggled Commodities

One day in September 1943, the sixty-year-old widow Liu Wei Shi received her niece, Li Xuezhen, as a guest, who came to ask Liu Wei Shi to work out a plan for her neighbor, Mao Fu Shi. She told Liu Wei Shi that Mao

83. Sinn, "Moving Bones," p. 249.
84. Zhou Shuzhao, "Beiping youguai de yanjiu," appendix, pp. 59–62.

Fu Shi had married Mao Baohe, a pedicab driver, a few years ago, but her husband lost his meager income when he fell ill and could not work. Their life was falling apart. Mao Fu Shi asked Li Xuezhen to help her find work to get by; and she went and asked Liu Wei Shi for ideas.[85]

Both Li Xuezhen and Liu Wei Shi had their own troubles. Li Xuezhen had been living under a tight budget for years, and Liu Wei Shi had recently lost her husband in May 1943. This family tragedy impacted her emotionally as well as financially. Widowhood in early twentieth-century Beijing was synonymous with impoverishment. Upon hearing Mao Fu Shi's story, both of them saw an opportunity to make a neat profit. They decided to sell Mao Fu Shi to a family in Zhangjiakou, but to do so they need to get Mao Fu Shi out of her home first. They told her that they knew a family in the eastern part of Beijing who was looking for a nanny. They said that Mao Fu Shi wouldn't get paid for the first few days of work; but if she met all the expectations and handled her duties well, she would be formally hired and paid thirty *yuan* monthly. Upon signing the work agreement, she would get her first two months' salary. The money could buy her about ten *jin* of rice, twelve *jin* of wheat flour, or twenty-four *jin* of corn flour at the current wholesale food price in Beijing.[86] Although the promised salary would not get Mao Fu Shi out of her dire economic situation, the job still appealed to her since it would at least offer her some immediate financial relief. She accepted the job, and her husband also agreed to let her go.

Mao Fu Shi left home on August 29, 1943. She boarded a train headed for Zhangjiakou, and upon arrival she was sold to a family surnamed Zhang. Back at her home in Beijing, Mao Fu Shi's husband waited for her to return with the promised salary. When she did not come, he decided to confront Li Xuezhen and Liu Wei Shi to find out his wife's whereabouts. Upon learning that the two women had taken his wife to Zhangjiakou, he called the police. On November 30, 1943, he filed a criminal charge at the Beijing District Court accusing Liu Wei Shi and Li Xuezhen of "abducting and selling person for the purpose of gain." During the court investigation, Liu Wei Shi admitted that she had a lot of local contacts at Zhangjiakou, and she had in fact traveled there

85. BPDFFY, J65-7-12301, Liu Wei Shi and Li Xuezhen, 1943.
86. BPSJ, J211-1-4, "Beiping pifa wujia diaochabiao" [Wholesale prices in Beijing], 1943.

six times in the last four months before she took Mao Fu Shi there. She also mentioned that she traveled back and forth between Beijing and Zhangjiakou to smuggle textiles for wheat flour.

Liu Wei Shi's business strategies and mobility were rooted in the trade networks that connected Beijing to its neighboring provinces. This regional system had been operating for centuries, circulating both goods and people legally and illegally. For instance, in late imperial China, merchants brought livestock, furs, and pilose antler to Zhangjiakou from Mongolia and Russia in exchange for tea, cotton cloth, tobacco, silk, medicines and herbs, and cooking utensils from eastern and central China.[87] Lieutenant Colonel N. Prerejevalsky, a Russian officer, wrote in his travel diary around the mid-nineteenth century about the train of camels that trudged across rough terrain:

> In summer all the camels are turned out to grass on the steppe, where they shed their coats and recruit their strength for fresh work. . . . The caravans of tea form a very characteristic feature in Eastern Mongolia. In early autumn, i.e. towards the middle of September, long strings of camels may be seen converging on Kalgan from all quarters, saddled, and ready to carry a burden of four chests of tea [a little under 4 cwts] on their backs across the desert.[88]

The exchange of goods transformed Zhangjiakou into a commercial center with a sizeable population of people of multi-ethnic origins.[89] Once the Beijing-Suiyuan railroad was open for traffic, cargo trains quickly replaced camel caravans and made the railroad the dominant carrier for regional trade.[90] But the Japanese occupation and wartime economic policy disrupted the existing system and fostered illegal trading.

By definition, "smuggling" is "a clandestine economic practice that bring[s] in and take[s] out from one jurisdiction to another without

87. Wang Ling, *Beijing yu zhouwei chengshi guanxishi*, p. 175.
88. Prerejevalsky, *Mongolia*, pp. 35–36.
89. Prerejevalsky recorded that the late imperial Zhangjiakou housed a multi-ethnic population of more than 70,000 inhabitants, including Han Chinese, Muslim minorities, and "two Protestant missionaries, and several Russian merchants engaged in the tea-carrying trade." From Prerejevalsky, *Mongolia*, p. 35.
90. Jingsui tielu guanliju bianyike, *Jingsui tielu lüxing zhinan*.

authorization."[91] Smuggling is the result of an engaged state defining and defending administrative borders and imposing restrictions on cross-border activities. In this sense, the Japanese invasion in 1937 turned north China into a war zone and wreaked havoc on unitary Chinese rule. Once peace and order were restored, the region saw a proliferation of ruling authorities. With regard to the area intersected by the trade route between Zhangjiakou and Beijing, the western section of the route came through the territory controlled by the United Autonomous Government of the Mongolian Frontier, whereas the eastern section came under the North China Political Council's rule. But collaborationist regimes only managed to control metropolitan areas and commercial centers along well-guarded transportation lines. Beyond these "points" and "lines," political situations became complex.

During wartime in north China, smuggling not only meant unauthorized cross-border dealings but also, specifically, trade between Japanese-occupied areas and those controlled by either the GMD or the CCP. When war broke out, the GMD local governments were driven out as the Japanese army moved in and, for the most part, replaced by the collaborationist regimes. But remnants of the GMD army and an array of GMD-backed guerrilla forces still held on in some pockets of remote areas. They kept their military presence and oftentimes maintained civil order as well. The CCP were the third, albeit an increasingly potent, source of order within the Japanese-controlled territories. Starting in 1938, the CCP armed force had successfully infiltrated enemy lines and established two forms of presence: the "revolutionary base" (*genjudi* 根據地) where the CCP were able to secure a military stronghold and stabilize civil rule, and the "guerrilla territory" (*youjiqu* 游擊區) where regular armies and guerrilla groups constantly harassed enemy authorities and made the CCP a competing source of order. This fractured political geography triggered bloody clashes as each side hoped to gain advantage over the others; it also disrupted regular trade flow as rival regimes imposed embargos, installed border inspections, and expanded the list of controlled items.

Among other things, the trans-regional drug trade created significant and sustained smuggling incentives and opportunities. Drugs, from opium to its various modern equivalents of morphine

91. Andreas, *Smuggler Nation*, p. x.

and heroin, had come into the discourse of Chinese political economy since the early nineteenth century. Political and social leaders repeatedly launched "war on drugs" campaigns; however, the drug trade not only survived but also expanded into one of the most profitable sectors of the economy and a reliable source of revenue valued by cash-strapped central and local governments across China. Drug use also became a popular leisure activity and a part of urban consumer culture.

It is hard to quantify the scope of drug addiction and the volume of goods moving in the Chinese drug trade, but estimates abound. The widely accepted estimate of opium addicts in the last decade of the nineteenth century was about 15 million, or nearly 3 percent of the total Chinese population.[92] Historian Yangwen Zheng cites one estimate which suggests that in 1935, on the eve of the Japanese invasion, 3,730,399 people out of a total population of 478,084,651 consumed opium or its modern equivalents."[93] In that same year, according to another source cited by historians Xiao Hongsong and Han Ling, there were between 200,000 and 300,000 drug addicts in Hebei Province (including Beijing and Tianjin metropolitan areas).[94] Speaking of drug production, the International Anti-Opium Association of Beijing reported to the Geneva Opium Conference in 1924–25 that China grew "at least 15,000 tons of opium annually, which accounted for about 88 percent of global production."[95] Beijing was adjacent to three provinces where opium poppies were widely grown—Rehe Province to its north and Chahar and Suiyuan Provinces to its west (see fig. 20). During the years before the Sino-Japanese War, the annual shipment from Chahar and Suiyuan to Beijing and Tianjin metropolitan areas amounted to more than 700 million *liang*.[96]

92. Spence, *In Search of Modern China*, p. 154. From Zhou Yongming, *Anti-Drug Crusades*, p. 20.
93. Zheng Yangwen, *The Social Life of Opium in China*, p. 186.
94. Xiao and Han also cites another estimate offered by a U.S. Treasury Department official. The American statistic held that in Hebei Province there were 300,000 opium smokers, 1.5 million heroin users, 800,000 morphine addicts, and 200,000 users of other types of drugs. Xiao and Han, "Minguo shiqi Hebeisheng de yandu xishi wenti," p. 117.
95. Slack, *Opium, State, and Society*, p. 6.
96. Xiao and Li, "Kangzhan shiqi Riben duhua Hebei shitai yanjiu," p. 4.

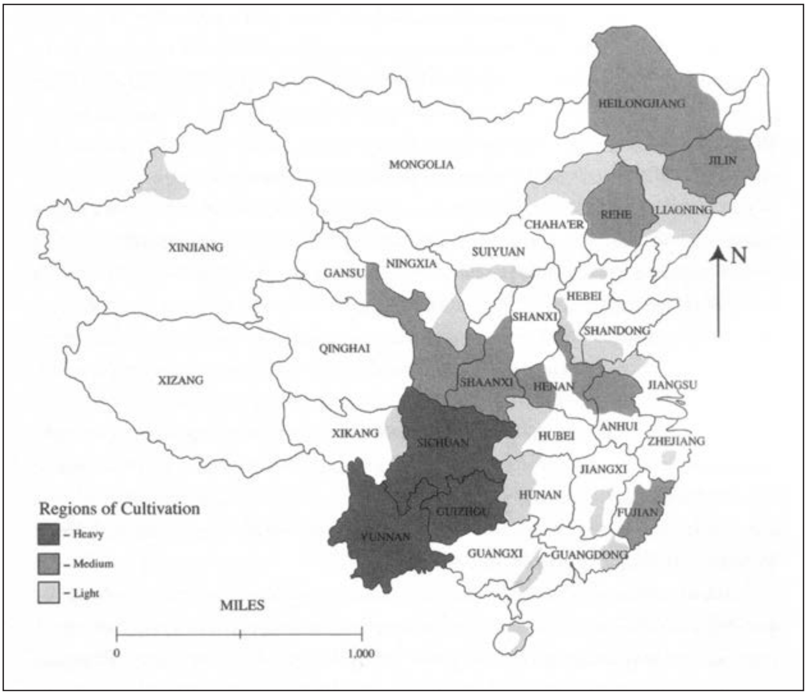

FIGURE 20. Opium Cultivation in Republican China, 1924–37. Reproduced by permission from Edward R. Slack, Jr., *Opium, State, and Society: China's Narco-Economy and the Guomindang, 1924–1937*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001, p. 7.

Early twentieth-century rulers, be they regional warlords, the GMD, the collaborationist government, or local authorities, saw drugs as less a threat to public health than an expedient source of revenue. In the name of "suppression through taxation" (*yujin yuzheng* 寓禁於徵), officials imposed a constellation of taxes and fines on the cultivation, transportation, and consumption of drugs. According to Edward Slack, the GMD central government's total revenues from 1934 to 1936 were tallied at 896 million, 1,031 million, and 1,182 million *fabi*, respectively; and for each of the years, the opium revenue "would have accounted for 11.2 percent, 10 percent, and 9.5 percent of the total and ranked the third in nonborrowed income behind customs and salt revenues."[97] At the local level, a drug tax subsidized a range of administrative tasks

97. Slack, *Opium, State, and Society*, p. 148.

and social programs, including policing, education, dike construction, military disbandment, warehousing, and public welfare; and "the dragon's share poured back into the black hole of provincial military expenditures."[98]

Understanding the importance of opium trade in provincial finance, Chiang Kai-shek's Nanjing regime made a deliberate effort to centralize the tax farming system hoping to "depriv[e] regional warlords of the source of their independence."[99] On April 1, 1935, the GMD government announced a significant policy shift with regard to drugs, that is, it replaced "suppression through taxation" with "absolute prohibition" (*juedui jinzhi* 絕對禁止). The new anti-drug crusade vowed to eliminate all dangerous drugs, particularly morphine and heroin, in two years and all opium production and consumption in six years.[100] For the most part, the campaign was an utter failure: "Opium was distributed as before—by those wholesale shops and retail outlets, whose number increased rather than decreased during 1936–38."[101] The drug trade was simply too massive to be eradicated in a short period of time; and many government officials and drug lords had a vested interest in keeping it unchecked.

Once north China came under Japanese occupation, collaborationist regimes quickly renounced the Nationalists' "absolute prohibition" and reinstalled the "suppression through taxation" policy. Two new agencies were created to give the government a near monopoly over the drug trade: the North China Superintendent of Opium Prohibition (Huabei jinyan zongju 華北禁煙總局) supervised poppy cultivation, transportation, and selling opium to wholesalers; the North China Association of Drug Wholesalers and Retailers (Huabei tuyaoye gonghui 華北土藥業公會) was in charge of tasks such as refining raw opium, making opium pipes, and selling opium to smokers.[102] It seems that the agencies' sole objective was to eradicate unauthorized dealings and unlicensed production and consumption, and thus to ensure that the government gained maximum profit from addiction.

98. Ibid, p. 121.
99. Ibid, p. 148.
100. For more information on this campaign, see Slack, *Opium, State, and Society*; and Zhou Yongming, *Anti-Drug Crusades*.
101. Zhou Yongming, *Anti-Drug Crusades*, p. 83.
102. Li Zhen, "Riben duhua Hebei shitai yanjiu," pp. 13–17.

Given the importance of the drug trade to government finances, officials not only sought to monopolize the drug trade but also took drastic measures to expand opium cultivation and refinement. In Suiyuan Province, for example, officials handed out opium poppy seeds to farmers for free and exempted opium farmers from military and labor services. At one point, the Japanese military even used airplanes to spray pesticide to protect poppy fields. In Zhangjiakou, the government employed more than 170 full-time workers and built an opium refinery with the capacity of refining 115,200 *liang* every day.[103] Under Japanese occupation, three provinces—Rehe, Chahar, and Suiyuan—developed into leading drug producers, and two major cities in the region—Beijing and Tianjin—both provided big consumer markets and served as distribution hubs from which the drug was transported to smaller cities and townships.

To create two agencies and to license every step of the drug trade reflected the government's ambition to impose order on the flow of drugs. However, such a monopoly did not materialize as officials so eagerly planned. The government's failure to achieve absolute control is reflected in the statistics of Rehe Province, for example, where the entire annual opium output reached fourteen million *liang* at its peak in 1943. Of this amount, government agencies acquired five million *liang*, another three million were sold to consumers within the province, and the remaining six million ended up in unauthorized trade.[104] The smuggling incentives in a booming drug market were simply overwhelming. For instance, one *liang* of opium in 1943 was worth about 30 *yuan* when government officials purchased it from ordinary farmers; it increased in value to about 60–70 *yuan* by the time it reached the provincial border, further increased to 150 *yuan* across the border in Beijing, and ultimately sold for as much as 180 *yuan* in Harbin in north Manchukuo.[105]

Even the Japanese military eagerly participated in this illegal trade. They routinely bypassed the Chinese border inspection and opened up back doors for opium trading between Manchukuo and north China. The profits went directly to the Japanese military, and nothing was left in the collaborationist government's coffers.[106] Private citizens, both

103. Ibid., pp. 29–31.
104. Ibid., p. 8.
105. Xiao and Li, "Kangzhan shiqi Riben duhua Hebei shitai yanjui," p. 4.
106. Li Zhen, "Riben duhua Hebei shitai yanjiu," p. 9.

women and men, responded to market demand by growing opium poppies and smuggling refined opium pastes. Compared with other government-controlled items such as staple foods, drugs were highly profitable and portable, lightweight, concealable, and durable, which made them a perfect choice for women smugglers. It was also common for human traffickers to entice their victims by promising them the opportunity to make money from the illegal opium trade.[107]

Other than drugs, the most popular smuggled commodities in wartime Beijing were food grains. A number of factors, such as the worsening food shortage, the government's predatory food control policy that prioritized military supply over civilian consumption, and basic survival instincts and tactics, set the black market for food in motion. For the first few years under the Japanese occupation, both the food supply and food prices in Beijing remained stable. Beneath the surface stability, however, problems mounted. War is one factor to blame. Guerrilla activities led by the Communists and the punitive campaigns initiated by the Japanese army in response disrupted agricultural production in some rural areas. Moreover, the Japanese and collaborationist government's policy to expand opium production further affected agricultural output.[108] But the wartime food crisis was a problem of production as much as distribution.

Beijing has historically relied upon other regions for most of its food supply. In their study of the food policy and food supply system in Qing Beijing, Lillian M. Li and Alison Dray-Novey point out that the city was located "in the unstable, drought- and flood-prone agricultural environment of north China."[109] To feed all of the city's inhabitants—from the imperial household, to the official classes, to the commoners whose numbers swelled well above one million under the Qing government's watch—imperial official employed various methods. The annual tribute grain shipment from the south and other regions ensured both the quantity and diversity of grain types. A system of government-run granaries prepared a strategic food reserve and allowed officials to sell food at reduced prices whenever a food crisis struck. Officials kept a close eye

107. Zhou Shuzhao, "Beiping youguai de yanjiu," p. 133.
108. Asada, *Riben zai Zhongguo lunxianqu de jingji lueduo.*
109. Lillian Li and Dray-Novey, "Guarding Beijing's Food Security," p. 996. For the thorough study of food supply in Qing Beijing and north China, see Lillian Li, *Fighting Famine in North China.*

on the private food market by limiting "the size, location, and inventories of grain shops" as well as punishing activities such as hoarding and price gouging. Finally, soup kitchens, mostly run by private charities, also played a role in helping the needy. All measures were to ensure that "[t]here was supposed to be no subsistence-related reason for the residents of Beijing to find fault with the government." After all, residents' expectations of food security "were largely fulfilled," Li and Dray-Novey observe; "even in the more troubled and less prosperous nineteenth century, food never became the focus of political action in Beijing."[110]

After the successful Qing experience, residents in Beijing must have been accustomed to the heavy hand of government in food supply management. However, when they looked to the government to safeguard their most basic need—food—in a time of war, they immediately found that wartime officials and their Japanese supervisors had a different priority. Instead of "nourishing the people,"[111] the wartime food policy was to prioritize the battlefield over consumers. Japan's larger war efforts on various fronts took precedence over the daily consumption needs of Beijing residents. The wartime food control regime was built on three institutions: first, the Bureau of Food Grain Management (Shiliang guanlisuo 食糧管理所) was in charge of making food supply plans and issuing food grain procurement quotas to local governments. Second, the Procurement and Transportation Administration (Caiyunshe 採運社) was the governing body of food wholesalers. In the occupied territories most wholesalers were private Japanese companies, and they were responsible for collecting grain procurements from local retailers and transporting them to granaries along railway lines.[112] The lowest level of food administration was the Food Cooperative and Exchange (Hezuoshe jiaoyisuo 合作社交易所), installed at the marketplace and overseen by the county magistrate. Its sole mission was to organize food retailers to collect food grains from farmers and ship them to wholesalers.[113]

As Japan expanded its war efforts in south China and the Pacific theater, the government in north China seized control over not only food grains but also other resources, ranging from textiles to fuels, and from

110. Lillian Li and Dray-Novey, "Guarding Beijing's Food Security," p. 993.
111. I borrow the phrase from the title of Pierre-Etienne Will, R. Bin Wong, and James Lee's book; see Will et al., *Nourish the People*.
112. Asada, *Riben zai Zhongguo lunxianqu de jingji lueduo*, pp. 14–15.
113. Ibid., p. 16.

medical drugs to metals—all deemed useful for military operations and thus banned from free market circulation. Because of the government's attempts to ration daily necessities and impose restrictions on the circulation of items deemed essential for war efforts, the black market expanded substantially. Food grains became a prized resource in a world ravaged by hunger; the black market therefore offered a way for people to obtain staple foods necessary for their very survival by circumventing government controls. The illegal trade of other items grew in quantity and diversity as well. One statistic released by border inspection officials in March 1942 reveals that in checkpoints around Beijing, a wide array of items were being intercepted and confiscated, including salt, peanuts, copper and tin, timber, peanut oil, sesame oil, cotton, cotton thread, millet, straw, wheat, coal balls, pigs, drugs, and dyes.[114]

The Japanese occupational authority and the Chinese collaborators considered the illegal trade an undermining force that threatened wartime economic policy and urban security. When capturing smugglers, officials detained them for several days and confiscated their goods. As the black market expanded and economic conditions deteriorated, official measures undertaken to suppress the illegal trade became increasingly draconian. The captured smugglers could face jail time, and while in custody they were likely to be tortured by Japanese military police and Chinese security personnel. In one incident, Chinese police beheaded three smugglers in public and displayed their mutilated corpses for three days to warn local residents of the consequences of smuggling.[115] But these harsh measures did not stop women and men from participating in illegal transactions; they just forced people to be more secretive and creative in planning skilled maneuvers to avoid the attention of law enforcement along the way.

Both institutions and individuals across political lines eagerly participated in this illegal trade. The CCP, for instance, raised purchasing prices to attract farmers from the occupied areas to come and sell their products.[116] The GMD also ran a fairly extensive trade network by placing their agents in cities and towns, business organizations and

114. "Huabei zhiqiang zongbu disanci zhiyun chengguo" in Beijingshi dang'anguan, *Riwei zai Beijing diqu de wuci qianghua zhi'an yundong*, pp. 305–6.
115. Guan and Li, "Minshufan fankang Riben qinluezhe de jingji fengsuo."
116. Asada, *Riben zai Zhongguo lunxianqu de jingji lueduo*, p. 72.

transportation facilities to acquire needed materials. With regard to individual smugglers, they were merchants, shop clerks, hotel managers, vehicle drivers, porters, and peddlers.[117] Railway clerks shared smugglers' profits by protecting them from police searches.[118] Women played an active role in the illegal businesses. According to one study of smuggling activities along the railroad between Beijing and Chengde (north of Beijing), some women managed to wear more than ten pairs of pants in a single journey in exchange for food grain. Some women in Lao She's fictional world of occupied Beijing participated in and made profits from smuggling activities as well:

> In fact, since the Japanese took over control of the grain supply, more people, predominately women, had risked their lives to travel to places like Zhangjiakou and Shijiazhuang to engage in illegal trade. This involves bringing fabrics and old clothing there and selling them in exchange for grains. Clothing was scarce in these places, whereas there was no food in Beijing so those who took the risks could make some money at both ends. This is a perilous venture. Women have to find ways to evade the Japanese inspection by bribing the personnel and patrol officers working on the railroads. Sometimes, they have to hide themselves inside trucks or lie on the roof of the vehicle. Once they acquire some food, they have to hide it in their sleeves or crotch to bring it into Beijing.[119]

Women and men who took part in the illegal transactions did not think of themselves as resistance fighters against the Japanese rule or as criminals; they thought only of getting by in an extraordinary period of political crisis and economic uncertainty. The black market operated as a vibrant "parallel economy" outside of official distribution channels; and smuggling simply became another survival tactic. Women followed the pre-war market system to locate supply and demand in order to make it through the growing economic crisis.

117. Liu Hao, "Cong dang'an shiliao kan Beiping lunxianqu renmin wei genjudi gouyun wuzi huodong."
118. Guan and Li, "Minshufan fankang Riben qinluezhe de jingji fengsuo," pp. 228–31.
119. Lao She, *Sishi tongtang*, p. 1088.

Conclusion

"The railroad not only facilitated travel," historian Amy Richter argues, "but created it."[120] The expansion of railroad tracks in nineteenth-century America greatly improved mobility and "created a new national space" that "fostered the commingling of city, country, and wilderness."[121] Margaret Walsh echoes Richter's finding in her study of the long-distance bus in twentieth-century America. She contends that women used these new services not only "for family visits and for shopping" but also for "leisure activity."[122] Innovations in transport technology and service changed the economic and cultural landscape in China as well. Liping Wang, for example, demonstrates that the railway made Hangzhou a popular tourist destination in the 1920s for the emerging middle class in neighboring Shanghai.[123] If railroads and modern roads developed tourism and the urban leisure culture in pre-war Shanghai, they played another kind of role in Japanese-occupied Beijing: helping to expand illegal trade networks in a region ravaged by war and economic crisis.

The war and occupation fractured north China. Officially, the region was divided into and ruled by three collaborationist regimes, but the reality was far more complex. All four major political forces—the Japanese, the Chinese collaborators, the GMD, and the CCP—maintained some level of military presence and established administrative structures. Despite these political divisions, unity could be found in the presence of an integrated transportation system. Illegal trade flourished. There was a sizeable market for women's sexual and reproductive services; and to facilitate it, the trafficking enterprise created a trans-regional pipeline that transported women from many different regions to Beijing's vibrant sex industry. There was also the pervasive black market that dealt primarily in food grains and daily necessities. The flow of goods and people showcases the ways in which technological improvement, war, and occupation interwove places and people into a regional tapestry of economic transactions, both legal and illegal.

120. Richter, *Home on the Rails*, p. 18.
121. Ibid.
122. Walsh, *Making Connections,* p. 181.
123. Liping Wang, "Tourism and Spatial Change in Hangzhou"; Ding, *Xinshi jiaotong yu shehui bianqian.*

Roads became synonymous with speed, efficiency, productivity, and progress; and they were viewed by intelligence officers as a valuable asset in war. The American military intelligence service paid close attention to the massive communication system operated by the civilian branch of the Japanese occupational authority. It noted that the North China Communications Company "controlled all the railway, highway and waterway transportations in North China."[124] Its Railway Bureau ran eleven railroads in the region. The communication infrastructure lubricated the Japanese war machine. The railroad, in particular, transported resources such as coal, iron, and food grain to key military strongholds to help the Japanese army continue its war efforts. Focusing on the tumultuous process during which roads were built or on the disastrous moments when they were destroyed, scholars have regarded roads as an anchor that fostered the national vision to industrialize China's mired economy, as well as a contested place where Chinese nationalism locked in battles with foreign occupation and international capitalist exploitation.

But as this chapter demonstrates, the roads also played a significant role in criminal undertakings at the time. Roads became a means to move women between marriages, families, and neighborhoods; when women were in flight, the line between lawful and illicit became blurred. As women crossed natural and administrative boundaries, they traveled for legitimate purposes and as participants in illegal schemes. Although the use of the roads became essential for many women's survival, such geographic mobility in women's lives became an administrative nightmare for government officials and triggered security campaigns. We will turn to an examination of these in the last chapter.

124. National Archives and Records Administration, YK-5674, "Political and Economic Report on North China," Office of Strategic Service, China Theater, July 11, 1945.

CHAPTER SIX

Policing Mobility

Zheng Chen Jinrong was eighteen years old in 1944 and employed at a tailor's shop in the Inner-1 District when she decided to run away from home. Her husband, Zheng Zhenyou, four years her senior, was a tailor, too, and he specialized in making Western-style suits. The couple lived together with the rest of Zheng Zhenyou's family. Their conjugal relationship was fine, but she had a problem with her husband's family, particularly her sister-in-law. In her later deposition, she described her sister-in-law as a powerful woman in the household who often scolded her in front of her mother-in-law. Zheng Chen Jinrong felt hurt by her insensible remarks and dismayed that her husband was reluctant to support her for fear of upsetting his sister. The tension escalated over time. On November 17, 1944, an altercation took place that pushed her over the edge. It started with her having an argument with her mother-in-law; suddenly, the old woman lost her temper and threw a teacup at Zheng Chen Jinrong's face. Someone intervened in time to separate the two enraged women, and calm was restored for the rest of the day. But the next day Zheng Chen Jinrong went missing.[1]

Before the altercation, Zheng Chen Jinrong would often hang out at a grocery store near her home in order to avoid family troubles. While there, she befriended Wei Yingmin, a male apprentice of her same age. On the day when the altercation occurred, she went to his home around seven o'clock in the evening. But she was told that Wei Yingmin was out drinking with friends. She walked away for a while and returned around eleven o'clock at night. She found him and

1. BPDFFY, J65-9-1747, Wei Yingmin and Zheng Chen Jinrong, 1944.

asked him to help her get out of Beijing. He agreed. They set out for Tianjin, where she hoped to find her aunt. But when they arrived in Tianjin, she did not find her aunt, and in the following days, Zheng Chen Jinrong and Wei Yingmin were on the move, spending time in trains, at the railway station, in different neighborhoods, and on the streets. Their flight ended abruptly at a wayside inn near Luofa Township, eighty kilometers from Beijing. During a routine neighborhood patrol, police officers found them suspicious and subsequently took them into custody.

Zheng Chen Jinrong's experience shows that once women decided to run away from home, their ventures often unfolded with unexpected drama. Their actions often resulted in relocation to different relationships, neighborhoods, districts, and cities or townships, far away from their homes. Several factors account for women's flight: the will to escape unpleasant family situations or the crushing weight of poverty, the enhanced mobility afforded by an expanding transportation system and hotel facilities, and the social milieu that showed a greater level of tolerance to let women explore public spaces. With regard to the roles and rules of women in public, in Zheng Chen Jinrong's case both the criminal investigation carried out by the Police Department and the cross-examination in court offer a window through which we can see the radical change from the imperial legal conception to new Republican codes. The gender norms in the Qing dynasty held that once women left their domestic sphere and made contact with male strangers, they would be tempted into improper behavior and licentious activities, which would upset a moral order that was based on the spatial division between domestic and public spaces.[2] Early twentieth-century reform movements undermined this gendered division of space. The reform rhetoric celebrated women's potential outside of domestic realms and urged them to make an active contribution to both household and national economy. Women were encouraged to enter the public realm to pursue educational opportunities and careers. In addition to the social reform movement that reconfigured urban sexual geography, the decade-long legal reform also recognized women's autonomy and sexual agency and loosened restrictions on social contacts between opposite sexes in public spaces.

2. Cheng, *City of Working Women.*

Although the women's liberalization movement of the early twentieth century had significantly broken down conceptual barriers that once denied women entry into public life and justified their appearance in various urban spaces, concerns about women's improper behavior and the threat they posed to urban social and moral order persisted. In Zheng Chen Jinrong's case, flight from home, an extramarital affair, and sexual encounters punctuated her adventures (or misadventures). Urban administrators, social reformers, legislators, and researchers worried that these problematic and promiscuous behaviors would jeopardize social mores and familial integrity. The war and economic crisis in Beijing further complicated the situation. Criminal activities that women engaged in undermined urban security. To cope with these challenges, municipal governments worked hard to put in place an elaborate control system to combat crime and monitor people's movements and activities. Signature programs included the neighborhood-based *baojia* (mutual surveillance system), examined in chapter 3, as well as the *hukou* (戶口, household registration system) and *shenfenzheng* (身份證, the universal system of identity proof) that stand at the center of this chapter. The new multi-layered control system allowed authorities to capture suspects, uncover enticement strategies, identify trafficking routes, locate criminal hideouts, and make timely arrests. And it was through the massive security apparatus and practice, as well as the ambition to maintain law and order in the war-ravaged city, that the wartime state revealed its full measure of power before residents.

David Strand argues that in Beijing, "the government of the street and the courtyard slum was the police force."[3] Due in large part to their deep roots in local neighborhoods and their extensive experience in administering over a complex urban society, police officers were an invaluable and indispensable asset to urban governance. But their image among local residents was in flux. In the early twentieth century, which were the formative years of the agency, police officers maintained a paternal posture in the eyes of residents. They built their reputation "not based on a capacity to function as a conduit, drawing deviants and troublemakers into an ever expanding prison system."[4] Instead, they

3. Strand, *Rickshaw Beijing*, p. 65.
4. Ibid., p. 74.

commanded respect from local residents through the way they used their authority "to make convincing arguments on behalf of social order and civil peace."[5] Although officers had ample opportunity and justification to intervene in residents' private lives, "the Beijing police force was not designed to manage or police family affairs," contends Strand, and officers embraced the role of social mediator rather than arbitrator.[6]

In wartime Beijing, police officers continued their administrative assignment through the work of documenting life-cycle events, fighting crime, and maintaining social order. Moreover, when lineage authority was absent in an urban environment and when civil organizations (e.g., unions and women's organizations) were in decline, the police functioned as an official voice, as important as one's neighbors, to help residents resolve family disputes. Besides performing administrative duties, police officers were also given a range of unpopular tasks such as distributing food rations, conducting household inspections, and drafting young men to armies. By handling these tasks, the police force embodied the terrifying power of the state and thus made itself a source of social grievance and, later, a chief target of the Communist revolution. Notwithstanding the tarnished image, the policing in wartime Beijing left a long-lasting legacy of an increasingly expansive police bureaucracy and invasive administrative policies upon which the Communist surveillance state was ultimately built.

Returning to the topic of runaway women, their experiences and other forms of urban crimes played a vital but less visible role in the making of the modern surveillance state. Women's mobility and movement, their actions to defy moral conventions, their ways of making money out of legal and illegal transactions, or simply their choices to live their own lives either in a fixed abode or in motion provoked the state to develop counter-strategies of governance. This profoundly altered the way ordinary urban residents perceived and interacted with the surveillance state.

5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., p. 86.

"A Gendered Undertaking"

"Traveling was a gendered undertaking," Timothy Brook argues in his study of travels in Ming China.[7] Men dominated the road; women "were not free to roam" except for a few occasions such as making a pilgrimage, celebrating festivals, visiting natal family, and going to temple fairs. The imperial formulation of gender propriety separated *wai*, the outer public world, from *nei*, the inner family space. The former was perceived as a masculine domain supporting men to travel to pursue an academic degree, to embark on a professional career, to engage in intellectual exchanges, and to obtain commercial profits through legal and illegal undertakings. By contrast, the latter imposed both a physical boundary and a cultural context within which imperial women were required and rewarded to live a private, quiet, chaste, and virtuous life in order to fulfill their domestic roles and family duties. Women's public presence therefore "became problematic and irritating in the eyes of men."[8] Male elites warned that once women left their domestic sphere and made contact with male strangers, they were prone to be tempted into improper behavior and licentious activities, which would destroy female virtue, endanger family honor, and upset the larger moral order. Recent studies have pointed out that the spatial seclusion reflects more of "a rhetorical distinction" than "actual practices"; and the *nei/wai* dichotomy was not fixed but flexible, permeable, and relative in everyday life.[9] Despite the flexibility, gendered seclusion remained an ideal and a cultural norm that generated hostility towards women's public visibility. Beijing is singled out by historian Weikun Cheng as the "fortress of Confucian orthodoxy" that "exemplified the strict bureaucratic handling of women's roles in urban public spaces."[10]

Nevertheless, by the time Zheng Chen Jinrong was in flight, reform movements since the final years of the Qing had introduced significant changes with regard to women in relation to urban sexual geography. The larger social reform promoted liberal ideals to integrate women into public life and to help them overcome their subordinate status in

7. Brook, *The Confusions of Pleasure*, p. 182.
8. Cheng, "In Search of Leisure," p. 2. Also see Naquin, *Peking*.
9. Goodman and Larson, "Axes of Gender," p. 5.
10. Cheng, "In Search of Leisure," p. 24.

the home and in society. Thus, opening sites such as schools, entertainment facilities, and civic associations to women and encouraging them to explore political expressions and cultural activities became absolutely crucial. Political and business leaders also sought to tap into the seemingly vast resource of women's productive labor. By urging them to work as well as consume outside of the domestic sphere, they hoped women could make an active contribution to revitalizing the sluggish urban economy.

Of course, the liberal campaigns did not completely dispel conservative social views. Women's claims over the meaning and function of public spaces and the ways in which they made their claims still encountered criticism and resistance. Local newspapers and periodicals published editorials and comments expressing concerns about "women behaving badly"—both realistic and perceived disruptions associated with women going out in public.[11] Those typical "bad" behaviors included women attending licentious shows, flirting with men at entertainment facilities, and engaging in street brawls. Despite cultural debates, the growing level of women's public visibility constituted, in Paul Bailey's terms, "one of the most striking social and cultural changes of the period."[12]

Unlike their imperial counterparts, urban administrators in the early Republican period accepted women's public presence. But they moved forward with a level of caution and reservation, and they never gave up on the ideal of limited social contact between men and women. They also followed the imperial notion that the government should take up the paternalistic role of protecting women from being exposed to physical danger, male lust, and immoral influences. To this end, they intended to create a domestic environment within the public domain, or, in other words, to domesticate the public space. For instance, women were no longer barred from watching theater performances. But admission came with restrictions that required women and men to sit in separate areas. Police officers sat in the designated seats in front rows near the stage to "enforce regulations and maintain law and order" (*tanya* 彈壓) in the theater.[13] Such a "domesticated" public realm was an orderly,

11. Bailey, "'Women Behaving Badly.'"
12. Ibid., p. 194.
13. Cheng, "The Challenge of the Actresses," p. 219; Zhiwei Xiao, "Movie House Etiquette Reform," p. 516.

safe, and segregated zone where women could take part in public activities while being protected from physical contact with men. The public space reconfigured by the government was no longer an exclusively male world but included a clearly demarcated feminine quarter, within which the code of female conduct as previously defined in a domestic environment remained in effect.

Both the imperial rhetoric of gender seclusion and the early Republican administrative practice of gender separation in public spaces assumed women's vulnerability and passivity. In other words, women were deemed incapable of "conscious autonomous action" and therefore not able to initiate sexual liaison; it was male vice and exploitation that led to women's moral downfall.[14] Thus, limiting physical contact between the sexes was one crucial way to protect women. Laws and regulations were based on this rationale. However, the legal reform under the GMD government in the 1930s, and in particular the new criminal law enacted in 1935, had fundamentally challenged the assumption of women's sexual passivity and brought about a new way in which the government conceptualized women's sexual agency and regulated their activities in public. The following story provides a case in point.

In early 1945, forty-four-year-old Yang Wang Shi noticed that her eighteen-year-old daughter's relationship with her boyfriend, Zhang Kexian, was spinning out of control. Her daughter, Yang Zhanying, often met her boyfriend at parks without her mother's permission. They also frequently went out to watch movies until late at night. Yang Wang Shi decided to separate them by sending her daughter to stay with a relative. However, a few days later Yang Wang Shi received a phone call from the relative, telling her that her daughter had run off. In a state of shock, Yang Wang Shi asked her relatives and friends to help her find her daughter. The search ended on July 7, when Yang Wang Shi learned that her daughter might have hidden herself in the home of Zhang Kexian's brother-in-law. She did not take action right away but asked her friend, Wang Qirui, to go there and make sure it was indeed her daughter's hideout. Wang Qirui was cautious in carrying out the investigation. He spoke with the wife of Zhang Kexian's brother-in-law first and was told that neither Yang Zhanying nor Zhang Kexian had been

14. Paderni, "I Thought I Would Have Some Happy Days," p. 6.

there recently. But such denial did not dispel Wang Qirui's suspicion, and he decided to wander about nearby for a while. When he came back shortly afterwards, he saw Yang Zhanying walking into the alleyway. He immediately confronted her and asked her to return home with him. Yang Zhanying first refused, but then agreed. The next day, she was back at home.[15]

The reunion lasted for just a few hours before Yang Zhanying ran off again. Yang Wang Shi was enraged. Her instincts told her that her daughter must have gone to her boyfriend's place again, so she rushed out, hoping to catch them as quickly as possible. When she reached Zhang Kexian's home, Yang Wang Shi saw him getting on his bicycle. Her daughter was standing by his side. Thinking about the situation and her daughter's defiance, Yang Wang Shi was overwhelmed with anger and shame. She felt "her heart pierced" (*xin ru dao ci* 心如刀刺). She wrestled with Zhang Kexian before the police arrived at the scene to arrest him. On July 17, Yang Wang Shi filed a criminal charge at Beijing District Court, accusing him of seducing, abducting, and raping her daughter.

In her testimony, Yang Wang Shi denounced Zhang Kexian as someone who "always used tricks to seduce young girls in the neighborhood and had many victims." His "licentious character" (*yindang chengxing* 淫蕩成性) and "bandit-like behavior" (*tufei zhi xingwei* 土匪之行為) threatened her household stability and was "harmful to the society." While condemning Zhang Kexian as a licentious and deceptive person, Yang Wang Shi praised her daughter's purity, morality, and filial piety. She claimed that her family "emphasizes 'moral teachings' (*lijiao* 禮教) and 'strict child discipline' (*guanjiao shenyan* 管教甚嚴), which is well known to our neighbors." Raised in such a traditional family, Yang Wang Shi claimed her daughter was an obedient and filial girl. To further testify to her daughter's moral uprightness, Yang Wang Shi provided an example: "When Zhang Kexian flirted with my daughter by riding his bicycle into her on purpose, she felt she was offended. Only after her friend Guo Shuzhen's mediation, my daughter let him go." To explain how her daughter ended up being sexually involved with Zhang Kexian, Yang Wang Shi stressed that her daughter "lost consciousness for a moment" (*yishi hutu* 一時糊塗) and yielded to

15. BPDFFY, J65-13-804, Zhang Kexian, 1945.

Zhang Kexian's deception and threats. In her words, "[w]ith the strict moral discipline she received at home, [Yang Zhanying] never would have followed the plan through without encouragement." Yang Wang Shi requested the judge to punish Zhang Kexian with severity in order to "stop the degenerate practice" (*yi wan tuifeng* 以挽頹風) of rape. Like Yang Wang Shi, many people testifying at Beijing District Court in the 1940s invoked traditional moral norms such as filial piety and chastity to defend women's innocence. They also reiterated the late imperial tropes that blamed male lust for women's moral downfall.

In contrast, a significant number of runaway women, Yang Zhanying among them, openly challenged the traditional notion of "woman as victim" and described their activities as a voluntary choice in pursuit of social and sexual autonomy. Their rebellious testimonies and the court's response bring to light the changing legislative and administrative approach to coping with the newly recognized idea of women's sexual agency. When police officers broke into Zhang Kexian's courtyard house to arrest him, they also took Yang Zhanying to the local police station for questioning. Recounting her liaison with her boyfriend, Yang Zhanying said:

> I often dropped in at my neighbor Guo Shuzhen's home. Because Zhang Kexian lived in the same courtyard house with Guo Shuzhen, I became friends with him. After chatting, we found that we "had good feelings towards each other" (*ganqing hen hao* 感情很好); I was willing to marry him. I mentioned this idea [of marrying Zhang Kexian] to my aunt and asked her to bring it up with my parents, but my parents opposed it. Later we stayed at the Oriental Hotel (Dongfang fandian 東方飯店) overnight and had sexual intercourse there, and we continued to have sexual contacts at other places. I am now two months pregnant. On the first day of the fifth lunar month this year, I moved in with my uncle Mr. Chen's family. On July 2, I moved again, this time to Zhang Kexian's brother-in-law Song Liben's home. My father's friend Mr. Wang found me yesterday, and I stayed with his family last night. While he [Mr. Wang] was planning to escort me back home today, I heard from my father that he was going to send someone to beat Zhang Kexian. I was scared. I fled to Song Liben's home to let him know [my father's plan] and begged him for help. My parents, however, came to Song Liben's home at this point. They berated me and beat Zhang Kexian — this is how I was brought to the police station.

Yang Zhanying's testimony offered a radically different version of her whirlwind relationship with her boyfriend, and it overturned almost all of her mother's accusations. She described falling in love with him and consenting to sexual intercourse numerous times. She was not abducted or seduced by him, but she ran away because her parents opposed their relationship. Like Yang Zhanying, many runaway women shocked their family members before judicial officials with explosive testimonies of courting, sex, and elopement. This way of recounting personal sexual rendezvous by runaway women in court in the 1940s challenged traditional female stereotypes as well as parents' claims regarding women's victimization and male lust.

The adjudication of the testimonies of women's sexual encounters reveals a dramatic change in the legal treatment of women in criminal investigations from the Qing to the Republic. Had she lived in Qing China, Yang Zhanying would have faced a tough prosecution. Women's reactions to male advances were under strict scrutiny. The *Great Qing Code* stipulated that if a woman was a victim of "abduction," she "is not punished" and "will be returned to be reunited with her family." [16] But if the woman in question willingly went along with her abductor, she would be held criminally liable and her penalty would be one degree less than that of her abductor. To explain both legal protections and criminal liabilities that women faced under imperial law, Philip Huang has introduced the legislative construction of a woman's "passive agency" in Qing China. The man was perceived to be "the active agent," whereas the woman maintained her agency by either consenting or resisting the man's advances. In other words, as Huang argues, "He, the law presumed, was the leader, and she the follower. She had a measure of choice, to be sure, but it was limited to what we might term a 'passive agency': she could resist or she could submit." [17] These statutory restrictions on the definition of abduction put women in a tricky position. If a woman relinquished her status of being a victim by giving her consent to the abductor, she would have to face the dire consequence of being judged an accomplice and would therefore receive criminal punishment. "The law protected their 'right' to say no," Huang explains, "but it also made them criminally liable when they did not." [18]

16. Jones, *The Great Qing Code*, p. 258.
17. Philip Huang, *Code, Custom, and Legal Practice in China*, p. 166.
18. Ibid., p. 175.

The new criminal law claimed to repudiate imperial legal precedent. It celebrated the new notion of woman as independent agent capable of conscious autonomous action, and thus re-conceptualized the issue of female sexual agency. The official indictment in Yang Zhanying's case reflects the new legislative principle. It read:

> She [Yang Zhanying] became acquainted with the defendant, and they became emotionally connected as time went by and they "vowed to be lifelong companions to each other" (*xiangyue wei zhongshen banlü* 相約為終身伴侶). One day in March this year, they had sexual intercourse at the Oriental Hotel and Yang Zhanying became pregnant. She consulted with her parents on the idea of marrying the defendant, but [her parents] opposed it. This July, they went to hide at the home of Song Liben, "hoping to satisfy both their wills" (*yi ji gesui suoyuan* 以籍各隨所願).

The court did not view Yang Zhanying as a passive victim; instead she, as the strong statement in the last sentence indicates, actively participated in every step of their relationship. Lawmakers and laws replaced the Qing conception of female "passive agency" with the recognition that women had autonomous agency. Such agency was more than just the power for a woman to say yes or no to a man's advances (after all, the Qing law also granted women that power); she was conceived by the new criminal code as having the full capacity to actively exercise her will. In Yang Zhanying's case, this new conceptualization of female agency translated into the judicial officials' view that she made a conscious decision to enter into a relationship with a man.

Under the new recognition of women's sexual agency, sexual segregation became unnecessary because women could make their own choices. Since the late 1920s and early 1930s, governments began to remove the regulations that prohibited women from mingling with men in public spaces. For instance, theaters permitted women and men to sit together when watching a performance. As previous chapters have demonstrated, teahouses and restaurants not only admitted women but also employed waitresses to serve male customers. The administrative priority from this time on was no longer to confine women to either family quarters or a "domesticated" public space. Laws and regulations now legitimized women's public presence in Beijing.

"A Home Away from Home"

Women's going public embodies the gradual albeit profound social reform movement that was sweeping across modern Chinese cities. Such public visibility, as reformers argued, was the bridge that brought women from submission to autonomy, from filial piety to individualism, and from economic subordination to independence. In seeking to explain this transformation, historians are accustomed to looking at those in the elite circle—reform-minded officials, liberal intellectuals, revolutionary cadres, feminist activists, business entrepreneurs, and cultural celebrities (e.g., movie stars who practiced the new cultural ideals)—as the chief force that moved social reform forward. Elites were celebrated as the masterminds behind the monumental reform, and the elite-centered narrative argues that it was through various institutions elites designed and promoted, such as political parties, schools, department stores, and cinemas, that lower-class women ventured into the public realm. Through the tireless guidance of elites, lower-class women learned to grapple with an idea of womanhood defined not solely in a domestic context but in close association with public life.[19]

Criminal case files, however, place lower-class women at the center of the social change movement, not as passive recipients of the elite's liberation message but as the driving force that charted the new relationship between womanhood and urban public space. In many instances, when lower-class women ventured outside their homes, their increasing assertion of mobility and their transgression of boundaries separating respectability from wildness gave public space a new meaning and stunned the very elite force that had sought to open the space to women. The following case illustrates the controversial ways in which women used one form of urban public space—the hotel space, in most cases cheap hotels and wayside inns in nondescript locations—as a place of shelter and safety. When enterprising women took flight with men, these lodging places provided them with a temporary home on the road, an in-between place for food,

19. For elite women's voice in the early twentieth-century reform movement, see Gilmartin, *Engendering the Chinese Revolution*; Wang Zheng, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment*; Judge, *The Precious Raft of History*; Strand, *An Unfinished Republic.*

drink, and rest. However, insofar as the police were concerned, these places harbored criminals and anchored immoral activities. One day in June 1946, several police officers showed up at Jixian Hotel in the Inner-2 District. They called out the hotel manager, forty-six-year-old Li Ruizhi, and took him back to the precinct office for questioning. Li Ruizhi learned from the interrogation that he was suspected of being involved in a kidnapping case. The alleged victim was a twenty-seven-year-old woman named Wang Huizhen, and the man who reported the case to the police was her husband, thirty-year-old Liang Jimin. Both were guests staying at Jixian Hotel for an extended period. Liang Jimin told the police that he suspected the hotel manager of helping his wife, who had run off recently, to find a hiding place. During the interrogation, Li Ruizhi firmly denied the kidnapping charge and told the police what he knew about the couple's allegedly difficult relationship. He said Liang Jimin was a magician who often left his hotel room during the day to perform; his wife spent most of the time by herself. The couple did not get along well and frequently fought. During their stay at Jixian Hotel, Wang Huizhen ran off once and did not return for about three days. In another incident, she attempted to commit suicide by taking opium. She was taken to a nearby hospital and given medical treatment. The hotel manager's testimony led the police to turn their attention to the couple's relationship, which brought to light a troubling history of domestic conflict.[20]

Wang Huizhen and Liang Jimin met in November 1944 in Qingdao in Shandong Province while staying at the same hotel. One morning, she ran into him in the hallway, where he was calling for a prostitute. But the incident did not turn her away from him; on the contrary, she approached him and their relationship quickly developed. In February 1945, they were engaged, and on May 27, 1945, they married in a group wedding ceremony in Jinan, the provincial capital of Shandong. One month after the wedding, she discovered that her husband was having an affair. She then tried to hang herself but was saved. Despite the incident and Liang Jimin's infidelity, they still lived and traveled together. In March 1946, they arrived in Beijing. Moving to a new place did not improve their relationship. In one incident, liang Jimin stripped off Wang Huizhen's clothes and beat her with a rope. In another incident,

20. BPDFFY, J65-13-3651, Liang Jimin, 1946.

he took her and another friend boating in Zhongnanhai Park. When the boat reached the center of the lake, something terrifying occurred. Liang Jimin claimed Wang Huizhen attempted to kill herself by throwing herself into the water, but Wang Huizhen described the incident differently. According to her, Liang Jimin pushed her into the lake intentionally. Later, Wang Huizhen admitted to two other suicide attempts by swallowing opium while staying in Beijing. One took place at Jixian Hotel, when she feared that her husband might beat her after she broke their radio set. The other occurred after she refused to leave Beijing to go to Zhangjiakou with her husband for his work (she said that the weather there would be too cold for her).

Over the course of about two years, Wang Huizhen and Liang Jimin traveled through several cities in three provinces and stayed at a number of hotels. It is clear that the transportation system and, in particular, the hospitality industry accommodated both Liang Jimin's itinerant performance schedule and his wife's companionship. As the dynastic and national capital before 1928 and a regional center of commercial and cultural activities thereafter, Beijing had developed an elaborate system of lodging facilities, which offered different management styles, amenities, services, and prices to cater to travelers' various budgets and needs. An early twentieth-century travel guide divided the hospitality industry in Beijing into four classes.[21] The top tier comprised mostly foreign-run luxury hotels (*fandian* 飯店) serving foreign travelers and Chinese political and business leaders.[22] The next category was the Chinese-run hotels. Expensive hotels, or business hotels (*lüguan* 旅館), offered guests spacious rooms and complimentary meals. Mid-level hotels, or budget hotels (*kezhan* 客棧), provided a more or less similar service to their pricy Chinese counterparts, although the rooms were generally smaller in size and the rates were lower.[23] The fourth tier was the inns, where guests brought their own bedding and shared accommodations. Some places even allowed guests to sweep the floor, carry water, and heat the stove in winter in exchange for cheaper room rates.[24] Inns offered an affordable alternative to other pricy hotels in the city.

21. Ma Zhixiang, *Lao Beijing lüxing zhinan*, pp. 229–30.
22. Cai, "You huiguan yizhan fazhan qilai de lüguan ye," p. 116.
23. Shikoku chutongun shileibu, *Qingmo Beijingzhi ziliao*, pp. 417–18.
24. Zhao Runtian, "Lüdianye shiling," pp. 135–38.

Aside from these four classes of hotels, there was a distinctive type of lodging facility called the *xiaodian* 小店, or "shabby hostel," which was home to the city's expanding underclass population who would otherwise be homeless. Local historical records reveal a great range of facilities within the *xiaodian* category, defined by inhabitants' backgrounds and financial conditions. At the top was the "group house" (*huowu* 火屋, or *huo fangzi* 火房子). The inhabitants were mostly members of the urban poor who lived on meager incomes, including street peddlers, menial labors, cart pullers, and itinerant barbers. *Xiaodian* managers provided rooms; inhabitants pooled resources together to purchase basic kitchen utensils and prepare daily meals. The next category was the "beggar house" (*huazi dian* 花子店). Local people also called it *jimao dian* 雞毛店, or "house of the hen's feathers," because of the featherbedding that the institute installed. The filthy conditions and squalor appalled observers. One foreign visitor wrote:

> This marvelous establishment is simply composed of one great hall, and the floor of this great hall is covered over its whole extent by one vast thick layer of feathers. Mendicants and vagabonds who have no other domicile come to pass the night in this immense dormitory. Men, women, and children, old and young, all without exception, are admitted. Communism prevails in the full force and rigour of the expression. Every one settles himself and makes his nest as well as he can for the night in this ocean of feathers; when day dawns he must quit the premises, and an officer of the company stands at the door to receive the rent of one sapeck each for the night's lodging. In deference no doubt to the principle of equality, half-places are not allowed, and a child must pay the same as a grown person.[25]

Their occupants came from a broad range of backgrounds, and included those who had recently lost their means of livelihood, rural refugees displaced by war or natural disasters, seasonal laborers, and mendicants. Sometimes people of this diverse group made money by working on odd jobs, but more often, they survived by scavenging garbage, begging on the street, or visiting soup kitchens run by local charities.

25. Abbe Huc, *The Chinese Empire* (London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1855). From Elder, *Old Peking*, pp. 152–53.

In the early twentieth century, most Chinese-run hotels refused to check in women guests.[26] When they finally allowed women to take up residency, hotels were asked by law enforcement to keep a close eye on immoral activities and illegal conduct associated with women's presence. Police officers routinely launched hotel raids. These policing measures led to a permanent association in the public mind of hotels, particularly lower-class facilities, with criminal and immoral activities. Police emphasized that, for example, hotel rooms were often used for sexual transactions. In the above case of Wang Huizhen, she had checked into the hotel where Liang Jimin was staying and saw him calling a prostitute to his hotel room. One day not long thereafter, she saw his door open and heard him showing off magic tricks to a hotel tea servant. She came in, sat down, and began chatting with him. She learned that Liang Jimin had a fairly successful career as a magician and could earn more than 100 *yuan* for a day's performance. The conversation gradually shifted to Liang Jimin's private life. She asked him why he remained single and told him that to call a prostitute was not a wise decision, since it would cost him money and increase the chances of contracting venereal disease. After some time, Wang Huizhen persuaded Liang Jimin to marry and implied that she was willing to live with him. In this case, although Liang Jimin called a prostitute to his hotel room in clear view of other residents and the hotel staff, it seems that nobody felt that such conduct was illegal, immoral, or unusual, which seemed to confirm the police's view that depicted the hotel as a morally ambiguous space.

Gail Hershatter's study of prostitution in early twentieth-century Shanghai mentions a rising popular practice known as "opening a room" (*kai fangjian* 開房間)—customers taking prostitutes to hotels for sexual encounters.[27] This was apparently the case in Beijing as well. Hotels, restaurants, and brothels conglomerated into entertainment districts. The Qianmen area is a good example. More than 250 brothel houses shared 15 streets with 40 native-place lodges and dozens of hotels.[28] The close proximity of hotels to brothels allowed hotel guests to easily seek sexual services. One prostitute working in a brothel reported in an interview with a sociologist that she usually received ten

26. Belsky, *Localities at the Center*, p. 237.
27. Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*, p. 115.
28. Zhang Jinqi, *Bainian dazhalan*, pp. 16–18 and 233.

to twenty customers every day. But when business was slow, she would answer customers' calls to provide service at their hotel rooms.[29] Hotels also facilitated other forms of sexual encounters. Criminal case files demonstrate that women visited hotels to pursue romantic relationships free from the watchful eyes of their family members and neighbors. Moreover, swindlers, pickpockets, robbers, kidnappers, and other criminals took advantage of the anonymity of the hotel to cover up an array of illegal activities. In some cases, hotel owners and managers were themselves members of criminal rings. Sociologist Zhou Shuzhao found that traffickers stayed at special hostels equipped with hidden doors and elevators so they could transport and hide victims from the police raids. Hotel staff sometimes worked as professional middlemen/women to help traffickers locate potential buyers and trap victims with false promises.[30]

To address these problems, the police regulations prohibited prostitutes from soliciting customers in hotels. Guests should neither bring prostitutes back to their hotel rooms nor let them stay overnight. The police also prohibited hotels from checking in women who traveled alone.[31] In addition, hotels should look for "any violation of the guest rules defined by the police, any change in employees, and people carrying firearms, the presence of those suspected of kidnapping women or children, any women suspected of eloping, any foreigners who stay in the hotel and any guests suffering from contagious diseases."[32] Violations of police rules would result in a fine and, in the worst case, suspension or revocation of the business license. But it is not clear how rigorously these rules were enforced. Sociologist Sidney Gamble noted that "in spite of the regulations we are told that many of the hotels are frequented by clandestine and even registered prostitutes."[33] The case of Wang Huizhen and her itinerant magician husband demonstrates that hotel guests oftentimes ignored the regulations and hotel management also turned a blind eye to this practice, as long as it did not catch the police's attention. Over the course of just over two years, Wang Huizhen

29. Mai Qianzeng, "Beiping changji diaocha," p. 506.
30. Zhou Shuzhao, "Beiping youguai de yanjiu," p. 62.
31. BPSJCJ, J181-16-52, "Beijingshi zhengfu gong'anju qudi lüdian guize" [Hotel guest policy, Public Security Bureau], 1934.
32. Gamble, *Peking: A Social Survey*, pp. 233–34.
33. Ibid., p. 234.

and Liang Jimin had been in numerous fights, and she had attempted to commit suicide several times. All these incidents occurred under the "watchful" eyes of the hotel staff, but not a single one of them was reported to the authorities.

The Regime of Registration

According to the police, "Knowing that it is not convenient to examine the body of females" by male officers, "many smugglers or rascals utilize immodest women for the purpose of carrying arms and transacting on illicit drugs."[34] Once recognizing women's frequent involvement in criminal activities, the proposal of creating a female police detachment emerged. In 1929, the Shanghai Municipal Government under the GMD regime recruited the first team of female police officers and deployed them in the Chinese-administered areas adjacent to the foreign-controlled French Concession and the International Settlement. The experiment in Shanghai yielded some favorable results; thus in 1932 the Ministry of the Interior announced its expansion nationwide. Recruitment was open to all females, aged between twenty-five and thirty, who were healthy, had earned at least a primary school education or equivalent, had a clean family background, and had never been sentenced to a prison term of more than one year.[35]

Beijing inaugurated its female police force in February 1933 and completed the first recruitment in April. Twenty rookie officers completed six months of course work and physical training and were then assigned to work at the police headquarters.[36] By October 1937, the number of women officers almost tripled, and in 1942 the group expanded to an independent Female Police Detachment (*nü jingdui* 女警隊) comprising ninety-three officers. After the Chinese recovered the city from Japanese occupation, the new Municipal Government reor-

34. BPSJCJ, J181-10-236, "Beipingshi jingchaju youguan zujian nüzi jingchadui de baogao he baokan huifu" [Beijing Municipal Police Department's report on organizing women police detachement and reply to local newspaper report], 1946.
35. Han Yanlong and Su Yigong, *Zhongguo jindai jingchashi*, pp. 680–82.
36. Ibid.

ganized the female police force and placed it under the Secret Agent Division (*tewu dadui* 特務大隊). They assigned a captain, a lieutenant, two staff sergeants, eight sergeants, and seventy officers. In the beginning, female police officers stayed inside the municipal headquarters and district offices to process paperwork. But they later joined the neighborhood patrol and were in charge of important duties such as inspecting household registrations and regulating brothels and prostitutes. Starting in October 1937, they were dispatched to railway stations and city gates to perform searches on female passengers. To establish an all-female police unit and place officers at the trouble spots known for harboring criminal activities, such as railway stations, city gates, and hotels, was just one step in the official response to women's involvement in criminal activities. The police force also launched a heightened security campaign and sought to create a comprehensive and effective system that would allow them to monitor people's mobility and detect and deter crimes in other public spaces.

Imperial rulers had recognized the threat of mobility and transiency to social and political order and taken measures to tie people to their native places. The well-researched reform under Zhu Yuanzhang in the early Ming dynasty was probably the most ambitious, aggressive example of the state's response to the movement of people across regions. The *lijia*—a "comprehensive system for registering the population and assessing each household for corvee and other services"—that Zhu devised represents perhaps the most extreme control system ever conceived and implemented in late imperial China.[37] With this system in place, the emperor attempted to, in Timothy Brook's terms, "immobilize the realm"—"cultivators were tied to their villages, artisans bound to state service, merchants charged with moving only such necessities as were lacking, and soldiers posted to the frontier."[38] But Zhu's ambitious program failed even before his death. Brook concludes that "there had just been too much spatial reorganization, too many migrants, and no way to trace their movements using the communicative means" available to the imperial government.[39] But Zhu's attempt inspired subsequent imperial rulers to develop a similar system, *baojia*,

37. Brook, *The Confusions of Pleasure*, pp. 19–23.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid., p. 30.

to govern the society. This system, too, deteriorated over time and had, according to Hsiao Kung-chuan, "ceased to operate" in the imperial capital by the end of the dynasty.[40] When *baojia* declined, the government lost the viable means to obtain population censuses and prevent crimes.

By the early twentieth century, most local residents in Beijing had "never heard of reporting household registration (*bao hukou* 報戶口)," as one government official, Mao Fushan, recalled.[41] Mao wrote:

> Military conflicts displaced ordinary people. Without permanent homes, household registration was not possible. People moved from place to place without bothering to obtain a household registration; officers from the local police kiosk knew who recently moved in or out but did not record [such population movement]. . . . The household registration existed only in name and the Police Department never implemented it seriously. Thus, an accurate enumeration of the national population was unavailable and the so-called population figure of four hundred million in China was just an estimated number.[42]

For most of the early Republican years, the police in Beijing did not have a functional system to help them keep track of the flow of people. It was not until April 1927 that the Municipal Government began to revamp the household registration system. As it was designed, all residents and long-time sojourners were organized into household units. People who worked as domestic servants and lodged at their employer's residence would register with the employer's household. In addition to the households that were based on the natural family unit, the system also created a separate category of "public households" (*gonggong hukou* 公共戶口) to include people living in government offices, business establishments, native-place lodges, hotels, schools, hospitals, religious institutions, factories, and brothels.[43]

The registration took down vital information such as the names of the head and members of the household, as well as personal information

40. Hsiao, *Rural China*, pp. 66–67.
41. Mao, "Jiu Zhongguo Beipingshi huzheng," p. 154.
42. Ibid.
43. BPSJCJ, J181-17-43, "Jingshi jingchating chengbao huji guize" [Regulations of reporting household registration by the Capital Police Department], April 21, 1927.

including gender, date of birth, native place, educational level, employment, marital status, disability, and address change. For filing purposes, each registration card was given an official control number and signed by the officer who processed the card.[44] Besides the routine registration process, the police authority occasionally singled out certain groups of people for security or political purposes and put special marks on their registration cards. For example, in the midst of security campaigns and anti-Japanese movements in 1934, the police marked cards of former convicted criminals with a red circle, cards of people engaged in suspicious activities with a red square, cards of people habitually engaged in uncivil behaviors with a red triangle, and cards of people classified as reactionaries, Japanese collaborators, drug dealers, and drug addicts with a blue square.[45]

To enforce the registration system, the Police Department created a separate Household Administration Section (*hujishi* 戶籍室) and appointed one director (*zong zhuren* 總主任), five associate directors (*fen zhuren* 分主任), ten inspection officers (*jichayuan* 稽查員), and thirteen registration clerks (*hujisheng* 戶籍生). Each police precinct also had a household registration office whose staff included one associate director, one general inspection officer, and a team of inspection officers (whose number would be determined by the number of police substations within the precinct). At each police substation, there were four registration clerks and two registration police (*hujijing* 戶籍警).[46] The Household Administration Section was in charge of processing registration paperwork and coordinating with other government agencies to perform routine household registration inspections (*cha hukou* 查戶口) in neighborhoods.

The registration system provided the government with critical demographic information. As it stipulated, life-cycle events, such as birth, death, marriage, and separation, must be reported within three days of the event. If there was a change of household head, residents must

44. Yao, *Huji, shenfen, yu shehui bianqian*, pp. 129–31.
45. BPSJCJ, J181-17-41, "Beipingshi gong'anju huji tebie dengji banfa" [Instructions on the registration of special household promulgated by the Bureau of Public Security in Beijing], September 18, 1934.
46. BPSJCJ, J181-17-43, "Jingshi jingchating hujishi bianzhi banfa" [Organizational regulation of the household registration division at the Beijing Municipal Police Department], April 21, 1927.

fill out an application form to explain the reason for the change. The heads of all public households (usually the business owner or manager) were required to report all staff changes to the police to help them keep track of the whereabouts of their workforce, and maintain a record of all their clients and patrons. Failure to fulfill these requirements would attract a range of penalties, from monetary fines to physical detention.[47] During the time of war, these demographic data allowed administrators to plan and implement the food-rationing system.

The *hukou* system was also designed to capture the itinerant population and keep track of geographic mobility. People were required to obtain a "moving permit" (*qianyizheng* 遷移證) and to report to the police three days prior to moving, and again within three days after settling in at their new address. Residents also must notify the police if they were planning to leave Beijing for a trip that lasted more than three days or if they were receiving visitors who would stay in Beijing for more than three days. The government now had an instrument to quantify demographic shifts and to measure the degree of mobility in a fairly accurate way. The figures show that in 1928, one year after the GMD Municipal Government inaugurated the system, government officials had already registered more than 1.3 million residents in Beijing's seven inner-city districts, five outer-city districts, and four suburban districts. Roughly 69,000 people had either moved to Beijing or had changed residence within the city. People registered their households at local police substations. After the mid-1930s, the looming threat of Japanese invasion accelerated demographic movements. For example, in 1935, the police issued move-out permits to 112,644 households and processed move-in registrations for 100,598 households. The movement slowed down considerably during the Japanese occupation. Nevertheless, one of every three households was newly registered in their home districts in 1937 (See table 6.1).

The campaign to revitalize *hukou* proceeded smoothly in part because of the city's fairly stable administrative structure. The Beijing municipality consisted of three administrative units: the city, the suburbs, and municipal counties. The size of the latter two units went through several substantial changes as the central government redrew the boundary between Beijing and Hebei Province, whereas the city

47. BPSJCJ, J181-17-43, "Jingshi jingchating chengbao huji guize."

Table 6.1
Population Movement in Beijing

Year	Total households	Total population	Move-ins		Move-outs	
			House-holds	Popula-tion	House-holds	Popula-tion
1928	262,173	1,329,602	14,256	69,013	11,378	51,019
1935	303,769	1,564,869	100,598	350,180	112,644	420,333
1937	295,061	1,533,083	98,008	369,881	102,099	416,302
1939	320,259	1,704,000	86,198	340,574	74,401	302,584

Source: Zhang Wenwu and Sun Gang, eds., "1928 nian Beiping tebieshi hukou diaocha" (Population census of Beijing Municipality, 1928). *Beijing lishi dang'an* (Beijing historical archives), 3, 1998, p. 16; ZQ 12-2-132, "Beiping shizhengfu jingchaju hukou tongji" [Population census by the Beijing Municipal Police Department], 1937; Mei Jia, ed., "Lugouqiao shibian qianhou Beiping shehui zhuangkuang bianhua bijiaobiao" (Statistical comparison of the social conditions in Beijing before and after the Japanese invasion). *Beijing lishi dang'an* (Beijing historical archives), 5, 1998:5, p. 28; ZQ 12-2-297, "Benshi gequ shimin hukou tongjibiao" [Population census by districts], 1939; ZQ 12-2-297, "Shimin qianxi tongjibiao" [Population movement statistics], 1939.

had a set administrative boundary delineated by its standing city walls throughout the early twentieth century. The municipal authority under the warlord government divided the city into two central districts, eight inner districts, and ten outer districts. After the GMD took power, the new Municipal Government downsized the number of city districts from twenty to twelve by simply regrouping existing districts.

Ordinary Beijing residents were certainly aware of the importance of the *hukou* system. They knew that if they did not obtain proper proof of registration, they were likely to face stern punishments. In one case, on January 30, 1943, nineteen-year-old Shao Shuying, along with her forty-nine-year-old mother Shao Zhang Shi and her sixteen-year-old sister Shao Shuqin, stood trial for abduction. The alleged victim was fifteen-year-old child bride Li Liu Shi. She ran away from home on January 2 out of fear of her mother-in-law, who threatened to punish her after catching her stealing from family and neighbors. She first hid in Shao Zhang Shi's home for one night. The Shao family helped her, albeit out of selfish motives. Shao Zhang Shi had arranged for her eldest daughter Shao Shuying to be engaged to a man living in Tong County in Beijing's east suburb, but Shao Shuying rejected this arrangement.

To fulfill the agreement with the matchmaker, Shao Zhang Shi saw an opportunity to replace her daughter with Li Liu Shi.[48]

But since Li Liu Shi was not registered to live with the Shao family, she would be arrested if she got caught during routine night inspections. By Shao Zhang Shi's arrangement, Li Liu Shi moved to a hotel where Shao Shuying had rented a room, but before the Shao family could work out a plan to take Li Liu Shi out of Beijing, an incident exposed their actions. On the morning of January 6, the two Shao sisters together with Li Liu Shi walked out of Shao Shuying's hotel room. While wandering around in front of Qianmen East Station, they noticed a woman who was old and appeared to be traveling alone. The two Shao sisters slowly and cautiously approached the old woman, while Li Liu Shi remained at a distance, watching. Just as they were about to steal eight *yuan* cash from their victim, the old woman's son rushed in and shouted at them. The railway station was a heavily guarded area, so the incident immediately caught the attention of the security personnel. The Japanese military police came to the scene first and arrested the three girls. Because it was just a minor theft case, the Japanese police called in the Chinese officers to handle the suspects. After a brief interrogation, Li Liu Shi confessed.

Household inspection officers routinely went into neighborhoods to verify records. Under the GMD government, an inspection team consisted of at least three officers who divided their duties in the following manner: the first officer thoroughly searched the premises and the occupants; the second officer gathered them into the courtyard and lined them up in the following order—household head, women, children, and (if any) servants and visitors; and the third officer checked everyone's household registration papers.[49] The collaborationist authority in the 1940s followed the GMD inspection procedures but instructed police officers to pay close attention to the following people and circumstances: people acting suspiciously, new residents, sojourners, and people in possession of firearms and other prohibited items such as

48. BPDFFY, J65-7-2124, Li Liu Shi, 1943.
49. For the organization of a night inspection team, see "Beijing xianbingdui tegao kezhang dui shishi hukou diaocha de zhishi" [Instructions on the inspection of household registration issued by the director of secret service division of the Japanese military police], April 6, 1941. In Beijingshi dang'anguan, *Riwei zai Beijing diqu de wuci qianghua zhi'an yundong*, p. 45.

publications with communist propaganda and anti-Japanese content. The Chinese police played a major role in performing these checks; and the Japanese military police occasionally went along, together with a Chinese interpreter, to supervise the process.[50] After the GMD army recovered the city from the Japanese in 1945, they continued to carry out household inspections to combat crime and, more importantly, to suppress growing Communist activities. The inspection process usually involved several agencies, including the Police Department, local army groups, military police, cadres from the local Nationalist Party organs, members of the Three People's Principles Youth League, and the local *baojia* headmen.[51]

Besides routine verification procedures, massive citywide inspections would be conducted occasionally in response to serious crime outbreaks or as a security precaution to prepare for special events such as festivals. For example, in early 1940, a series of sniper shootings put the city on a high security alert. Because the Japanese military staff and top Chinese collaborators were targets in each sniper ambush, the Beijing Police Department was under intense pressure to make an arrest quickly. Suspecting that some snipers might be guerrilla fighters coming from other places and hiding in the city's neighborhoods, police launched a citywide household inspection from May 16 to June 15. Police officers were organized in teams to search out any criminal and suspicious elements in the neighborhoods.[52]

Both the GMD government before 1937 and the Chinese collaborationist regime faced a population that had become more complex, diverse, volatile, and mobile than before. They recognized that it was simply infeasible to try to inhibit physical and social mobility. Moving around had become an everyday practice and a survival tactic for many people. Administrators could therefore only build a surveillance system that would make people's movements more transparent and traceable. At the core of the system was the *hukou*, which gave administrators up-to-date demographic information and a relatively accurate social

50. BPSJCJ, J181-14-170, "Beijing tebieshi jingchaju xunling: hukou da soucha fang'an" [Order issued by the Beijing Municipal Police Department: Program of massive *hukou* inspection campaign], May 1940.
51. Mao, "Jiu Zhongguo Beipingshi huzheng," p. 164.
52. BPSJCJ, J181-14-170, "Beijing tebieshi jingchaju xunling: hukou da soucha fang'an."

and economic overview of the neighborhood. Unlike the *hukou* system implemented later under the Communist regime, which created a formidable urban/rural divide and effectively blocked geographic and social mobility between urban and rural places, the household registration under the GMD and the collaborationist regime sought primarily to make mobility intelligible and quantifiable for the state. Eventually the registration system evolved into the institutional foundation for governments to implement other key policies such as tax collection, food distribution, hygiene administration, and crime prevention. Law enforcement officials worked hard to keep the system up to date and aggressively pursue people who dared to "slip through the holes in the registration system."[53]

Policing Anytime and Everywhere

The search for an effective means of controlling mobility did not stop after *hukou* was put into place. Officials gradually recognized that one's *hukou* was neighborhood-based; and yet there were certain people, such as smugglers, traffickers, and itinerant entertainers, who never stayed in one place for long, and they in fact were often living in between neighborhoods and districts to evade the official control system. To a larger extent, the entire city was on the move. Residents moved because of marriage and separation, jobs, and in search of affordable rental housing. When people moved around frequently for convenience or out of necessity, and when mobility ultimately became a way of life, the government was pressed to look for a new system that could identify, control, and monitor them anytime and everywhere. The Japanese occupation accelerated the administrative reform process, as the authority sought to combat dangerous forms of mobility such as the rampant illegal trade and rising guerrilla activities. Based on *hukou*, administrators developed a second system, *juzhuzheng* 居住證, or residence card. The two systems were mutually supportive and complementary. The *hukou* organized residents into bureaucratic units for census, taxation, rationing, and security purposes; the *juzhuzheng* helped law enforcement officials

53. Brook, *The Confusions of Pleasure*, p. 29.

identify people who frequently traveled away from their household, precinct, and district units.

In one case, police found a runaway wife during a routine neighborhood patrol. Sergeant Meng Youzhong and a team of officers were walking through a residential neighborhood in Beijing's northeastern suburb on the night of May 29, 1945, looking for suspicious activities and people who violated the *hukou* rules. At around midnight, they stopped at the house of a man named Tang Wenxian. After ordering the people to gather in the courtyard, Sergeant Meng began to verify the status of their household register. The inspection went smoothly until the last two people in the group, a man and a woman, drew Sergeant Meng's attention. They were not listed as residents of Tang Wenxian's home, so Sergeant Meng asked them to show their identification. They each handed over their residence card, which was a small piece of paper measuring 90 cm. × 60 cm. It recorded the bearer's name, age, gender, occupation, and address. A photo was affixed to the top of the card, and there were the bearer's two index fingerprints at the bottom. The man's card showed that he was Li Yunzao, aged twenty-eight. The woman with him was Li Guo Shumin, twenty-four years old, who claimed to be his wife. Right before handing the document back to her, Sergeant Meng noticed something suspicious. The character "Li" on Li Guo Shumin's card looked like it had been changed. After a brief interrogation, she admitted that the smudged character should have been "Jin," her legal husband's surname, and that she was a runaway wife. Sergeant Meng immediately took her and Li Yunzao into custody. Later, at the police precinct office, she confessed that she was Jin Guo Shumin, whose husband was Jin Wenying, the director of a county hospital about seventy kilometers east of Beijing.[54]

Jin Guo Shumin's domestic problems started the year before, in 1944. Her husband had rented a place in the Inner-2 District in Beijing for her and their two children; but he lived in the hospital dorm to avoid commuting every day. She occupied three of the four rooms on the south side of a courtyard compound; the last room housed a single man, Li Yunzao. Since her husband came home only a few times a month, she often asked Li Yunzao to help her with odd jobs like heavy lifting and maintenance. He helped out all the time, and as a result,

54. BPDFFY, J65-13-3737, Jin Guo Shumin and Li Yunzao, 1945.

their relationship grew closer. Then, when her husband did not return home on the day of the Lunar Moon Festival, a time traditionally reserved for family reunion, she stopped by Li Yunzao's home. They played mahjong together with some friends and neighbors and started drinking. One after another, the other guests left, but Jin Guo Shumin stayed with Li Yunzao that night. As time went by, their relationship stirred up gossip among the neighbors, and Jin Guo Shumin's husband soon learned of the affair. On April 7, 1945, the landlord brought a letter to her. It was from her husband, saying that he was about to confront her and Li Yunzao. She passed this letter to Li Yunzao instantly. Feeling intimidated by Jin Wenying's threatening words, Li Yunzao decided that he and Jin Guo Shumin should leave Beijing and find temporary shelter in his hometown of Zhangjiakou.

If the incident had happened four years earlier, traveling over such a long distance would have been difficult. The Japanese occupational authority and the Chinese collaborationist regime had imposed a regulation that required all travelers to obtain permission to travel and to carry with them a Provisional Travel Pass (*linshi lüxingzheng* 臨時旅行證).[55] Travelers were required to go to the police precinct office and fill out a form providing some identity information, their travel destination, and the purpose of their trip.[56] Only with the travel pass could they then purchase a ticket to board a commercial train, long-distance bus, or passenger ship. Those who sojourned in Beijing carrying a *hukou* card from a different locality were required to submit additional supporting documents, such as an identity document issued by their local government and a guarantee letter from a registered Beijing resident.[57]

But the authority quickly found that the above procedure was virtually impractical. Some people could evade the system by not taking

55. BPSJCJWC, J183-2-24148, "Huabei jiaotong gongsi tonggao" [Public announcement issued by the North China Vehicle Co.], February 11, 1941.
56. BPSJCJWC, J183-2-24148, "Niding gequ fenju faxing linshi lüxing xukezheng shouxu banfa" [Provisional regulation on issuance of travel pass], February 20, 1941.
57. BPSJCJWC, J183-2-24148, "Beijing tebieshi gongshu jingchaju xunling: fafang juzhuzheng weijing wanbi yiqian, yuanban linshi lüxing zhengmingshu banfa reng zhaojiu banli" [Order issued by the Beijing Municipal Police Department: Before the issuance of residence card is complete, the pre-promulgated provisional procedure on issuance of travel pass remains in effect], July 1, 1941.

modern forms of transportation. Moreover, the supporting documents came in too many different forms and were issued by too many different local authorities. There was just no way for the police in Beijing to verify them in a timely fashion. In light of this, the Municipal Government began to introduce the Residence Card—a portable form of official identity proof intended for all residents of Beijing and surrounding suburbs aged between twelve and sixty—to tackle these problems and to deal with the constant flow of people. The Municipal Government began an experimental program with the new residence card in the suburbs in late 1938 and expanded it to cover residents in all Beijing city districts in mid-1941.

The reform effort started with a propaganda campaign. Thousands of big-character posters were hung along the major streets of the city. The director of the household administration section at the Police Department spoke on the radio to explain in detail the system's mission and its planned implementation process. The official announcements were also published in newspapers. After the intensive propaganda preparation, the government began to issue residence cards in May 1941. All native residents and people living in "public households" such as commercial premises, temples, churches, schools, native-place lodges, hospitals, factories, entertainment facilities, hotels, and commercial apartments were required to report to the police precinct office to apply for the card.[58] Applicants must submit an application form, three photos, prints of two index fingers, and a guarantee letter in order to obtain the card.[59] The government instructed each police precinct office to assign two officers to work full time on this program: one was responsible for collecting and verifying application forms, and the other for issuing

58. BPSJCJWC, J183-2-24148, "Beijing tebieshi gongshu jingchaju xunling" [Order by the Beijing Municipal Police Department], June 24, 1941.

59. Some people were exempted from the fingerprint requirement. This group included current and retired officials, directors of various departments at the Japanese-sponsored Association of New People, presidents and deans at national universities and colleges, chairs of the Chamber of Commerce, and board members and executives of state-owned companies. But one's exemption status had to be verified and approved by the Japanese military police first. BPSJCJ, J181-14-174, "Beijing tebieshi jingchaju xunling: banfa juzhu zhengshu teshu shenfen diwei zhi ren jiqi jiashu mianyin zhiwen xunling" [Order issued by the Beijing Municipal Police Department: exemptions of people with special social status and their family members from the fingerprint taking requirement], June 23, 1941.

cards (150 pieces per workday).[60] By mid-August 1941, three months after the new control system made its debut, more than one million cards were issued, which covered about 60 percent of the city's population.[61] By September, people were required to carry the residence card at all times for inspection. One could face a range of penalties, from monetary fines to detention and prison terms, for failure to present the card, forgery, or alteration of the card.[62]

Officials promised that people with a residence card would be allowed to travel freely as long as they did not cross administrative borders. In other words, Beijing residents could use the card to purchase tickets at any time to board any passenger train or long-distance bus to travel anywhere in four provinces (Hebei, Shandong, Shanxi, and Henan), three special municipalities (Beijing, Tianjin, Qingdao), and two special administrative districts (Weihai and northern Jiangsu), since all of these places were under one political authority.[63]

Local residents clearly understood the card's intended function. In Jin Guo Shumin and Li Yunzao's case mentioned above, they both understood that they needed this document to travel, but at the same time, if checked by the police their cards would be an obstacle to their escape plan. Jin Guo Shumin's card showed that she was a married woman living in Beijing. It would raise suspicion if she traveled over a long distance with Li Yunzao, an unrelated man. Under these restricting circumstances, attempting to alter their residence cards was probably their only choice. There was a loophole in the system that worked to their advantage. The system recorded the bearer's home address by district number, street (or alleyway) name, and street number. It did not specify the room number or if the bearer lived in a multi-family courtyard compound. Put differently, Jin Guo Shumin and Li Yunzao already "lived together" on the card since they lived in the same compound. The

60. BPSJCJ, J181-14-173, "Beijing tebieshi jingchaju banfa juzhu zheng chengxu" [Procedures of issuance of residence card passed by the Beijing Municipal Police Department], May 12, 1941.
61. BPSJCJ, J181-14-174, "Banfa juzhuzheng shumu tongjibiao" [Statistic of the number of issuance of residence cards], June 25–August 15, 1941.
62. BPSJCJ, J181-14-260, "Jiancha juzhuzheng yaoling" [Key points on the inspection of residence cards], August 12, 1941.
63. For the occupied territories under the North China Political Council, see Li Tiehu, "Beiping wei linshi zhengfu xiajing zhengqu yange shulue," p. 62.

only thing that they needed to do before traveling as a married couple was to change her husband's surname on her card. This is exactly what they did.

On April 7, 1945, Li Yunzao left Beijing for Zhangjiakou, and Jin Guo Shumin departed the next day. She took her daughter with her to disguise herself as a woman visiting her natal home. Upon arriving at Zhangjiakou, she stayed in a hostel with Li Yunzao for more than twenty days. Then a tragic incident happened: her daughter died of a sudden illness. In a state of sadness, she told Li Yunzao that she wanted to go back to Beijing. He agreed. On the night of May 29, they arrived in Beijing by train. Li Yunzao did not let Jin Guo Shumin go home directly but took her to his relatives' home in the suburbs, where they were eventually caught by the *hukou* inspection team. After the police transferred the case to the Beijing District Court, Li Yunzao stood on trial for "seducing and attempting to engage in an illicit sexual relationship with a married woman" and Jin Guo Shumin for "forging an identity document." During the trial, Jin Guo Shumin claimed that Li Yunzao was the one who had changed the residence card, but he denied it. The court ordered a handwriting examination, and the result acquitted Jin Guo Shumin. On June 16, 1945, Li Yunzao was convicted and sentenced to six months in prison.

About two months after the trial, Japan surrendered, the collaborationist regime collapsed, and the GMD government took over control of Beijing. The new authorities began the recovery work with an overhaul of the municipal workforce. Only about 40 percent of officials who had worked for the collaborationist regime were allowed to keep their positions in the new government.[64] Regarding the security system, the GMD did not introduce a new control apparatus; but it made an effort to update the *hukou* records that they had installed before the war, and continued to regard it as an effective device that safeguarded urban security. They were familiar with the residence card system, too. As a matter of fact, the GMD had implemented the Resident Identification Card (*jumin shenfenzheng* 居民身份證), a similar system but with a slightly different name, in its wartime capital, Chongqing.[65] The identification

64. BPSZF, J1-7-417, "Guangfu yinian Beijingshi zhengfu digao" [Draft report of municipal administration in the first year of recovery], 1946.
65. Mao, "Jiu Zhongguo Beipingshi huzheng," pp. 155–57.

system helped officials remain vigilant and combat disorderly, disruptive, and dangerous activities in a city that had a congregation of political dissidents, Communist activists, Japanese agents, wartime refugees, and secret societies.

Up until this time, the identity proof system had remained as a locally run institution. The local administrative authorities issued identity documents to residents within their jurisdiction. Documents from different jurisdictions differed in size and design. But in 1947, the GMD government launched a program to introduce a national identification document, the Citizen's Identification Card (*guomin shenfenzheng* 國民身份證).[66] The program reflected officials' concern about people's growing level of mobility and movements beyond the local and regional districts. Introducing a portable and universal identity proof could help build a national web of surveillance to closely monitor people's movements. However the national program was not brought to fruition; it was proposed at the time when the GMD government was starting to crumble under the escalating inflation and the Communist offensive.

The Citizen's Identification Card introduced by the GMD and, earlier, by the collaborationist officials had its predecessors. Imperial rulers had tried similar security measures to control mobility. For example, the Ming dynasty's *lijia* system represented perhaps the boldest attempt to encapsulate demographic movements in an empire-wide web of registration and taxation. The imperial government also had experimented with the portable identity document. Officials issued "ordination certificates" (*dudie* 度牒) to Buddhist monks and Daoist clerics in order to keep these notoriously mobile groups, who did not belong to ordinary household units, in check. But the GMD and puppet officials accomplished something truly remarkable when they reinvigorated the household registration system and introduced a universal identity proof. They transformed what would have been an exceptional albeit short-lived program in late imperial China, envisioned and tried only by the ambitious Hongwu emperor of the Ming dynasty, into a routine bureaucratic procedure that helped the government rule over a mobile society.

66. BPSZF, J1-7-1355, "Beipingshi zhengfu ling: xiuzheng Beipingshi zhengfu banli zhifa guomin shenfenzheng shishi chengxu" [Order issued by the Beijing Municipal Government: revised procedures of processing and issuing Citizen's Identification Card], July 26, 1947.

The State in Action

It was through vital policing programs and other routine administrative tasks that the wartime state extended and expanded its authority into the vast urban neighborhoods and ordinary people's everyday lives. The police precinct office, where police "gathered basic information about neighborhoods, especially household registry data, and supervised the daily routine of postings and patrols," formed the nexus of urban governance.[67] Out on the streets, the police officer on the beat represented the bureaucratized administrative power and the *baojia* headman stood for informal state authority embedded in the community. Some residents did see government agents, particularly the police, as a source of help to restore domestic harmony. They reached out to officers to punish runaway wives, admonish abusive husbands, and discipline delinquent sons and daughters. Others were more ambiguous in their relationship with police officers and *baojia* headmen, largely because of the intimidating wartime state power they represented and the predatory wartime policies they helped to implement. This section will examine the mixed and ambivalent ways in which women in Beijing perceived and interacted with the police.

PATERNAL INTERVENTION

In one case, Yang Wen Shi had been in three different marriages over a period of five years. Her legal husband was a peasant suffering from a chronic illness who could contribute little to the family's finances. Confronted with abject poverty, Yang Wen Shi asked a neighbor to help her remarry. In October 1937, she was introduced to another man. She claimed that she was a widow, and they were quickly married. However, the new relationship did not relieve her from poverty, and she felt hopeless again. One day in June 1941, with the help of neighbors and friends, she fled and married her third and last husband, Yang Fuchun. Before she was settled in the new marriage, however, Yang Wen Shi once again changed her mind and ran back to her second husband.[68]

67. Strand, *Rickshaw Beijing*, p. 81.
68. BPDFFY, J65-6-225, Yang Wen Shi, 1942.

Wifely desertion signified a family crisis—it was a woman's open challenge to the integrity of the marriage and the husband's authority. Despite the reformist rhetoric emerging in the late Qing that encouraged women and men to free themselves from traditional family bonds, in the 1940s people in Beijing still viewed a wife's decision to elope as an indication of a husband's failings. Moreover, if the elopement was derived from a sexual liaison, it caused significant damage to a woman's reputation and the family's social standing. Last but not least, given the costly steps for men to marry discussed in previous chapters, a husband suffered significant financial loss when his wife took flight. Since the stakes were so high, it was not unusual for a husband, together with his family members, to enlist help from friends and neighbors to monitor his wife. When domestic and neighborhood methods of supervision failed, husbands and their family members went to the police and the courts for assistance.

In Yang Wen Shi's case, on the morning of January 17, 1942, her sister-in-law, twenty-one-year-old Yang Li Shi, headed to the police office with a mission in mind—to ask officers to take action to retrieve her brother's runaway wife. Criminal law justified police intervention, and so Sergeant Shen Rongshun received the case and set out to investigate all possible leads immediately. As discussed before, while lawmakers recognized women's autonomy, they were concerned that both female agency and sexuality could threaten the institution of marriage. Married women's actions became more than individual choices and expressions of autonomy; they affected constructions of family and social order. Therefore, controlling sexual relationships outside of legitimate marriage and protecting the integrity of conjugal relationships remained essential tasks in twentieth-century legislative campaigns and policing activities. To defend the institution of marriage, the law introduced two new categories of crime: "Offences against Personal Liberty" (*fanghai ziyou zui* 妨害自由罪) and "Offences against the Institutions of Marriage and the Family." The Criminal Code made it clear that it protected both the individual's free will and family integrity. In practice, this meant that when a case of elopement was brought to the courts, the runaway wife herself and other people involved could be prosecuted and punished—not for violating a woman's right to exercise free will but for destabilizing her marriage. Put differently, the law retained a husband's authority to block his wife from leaving or entering relationships of which he disapproved.

Case files reveal that twentieth-century lawmakers and judicial officials, though operating in a radically different context of political philosophies and cultural beliefs, embarked on the same mission that their imperial counterparts did centuries earlier: they set out to define women's sexuality and defend the integrity of the family in the face of drastic and often disruptive changes. Imperial lawmakers in the eighteenth century, as Matthew Sommer has suggested, engaged in a concerted campaign to make the humble peasant household "the foundation of late imperial order."[69] They enlisted women's moral consciousness and sexual purity to defend a patriarchal family order. Such ideologically and legislatively fortified families allowed the Qing state to stabilize social and moral order when physical and social mobility undercut familial and communal control, while also allowing it to counter the grave and growing threat posed by underclass "rogue males"—men displaced by the commercialized economy and forced to stray from normative family relations. Despite its harsh criticisms of imperial legislative principles, the social and legal reform since the late Qing dynasty inherited a paternalist mission to protect the integrity of the family. The police officers in early Republican Beijing translated this mission into action. As David Strand puts it, they would "look after the city, settling little disputes that arise over collisions on the street, giving advice here and there."[70] They made themselves a crucial force to ensure social order and civil peace.

"TALONS AND TEETH"

Returning to Yang Wen Shi's elopement case, it was not difficult for the police to locate her once they began looking. Sergeant Shen followed one lead and walked to No. 37 North Garrison Street near Chaoyang Gate in east Beijing, the place where Yang Wen Shi was believed to be hiding. At this address, he found a row house with four units. He knocked on the door of the second unit on the left. The woman who answered the door said she was Ji Tian Shi. Sergeant Shen asked to verify her household registration card. The card confirmed that she was the wife of the household head Ji Ling and that their seven-mem-

69. Sommer, *Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China*, p. 310.
70. Strand, *Rickshaw Beijing*, p. 71.

ber family was registered to live in the unit. Under further questioning, Ji Tian Shi admitted that the runaway wife, Yang Wen Shi's mother, was her aunt and that Yang Wen Shi had come to stay with her for a short time several months ago. Ji Tian Shi's testimony led the police to Yang Wen Shi's natal home; later they found and arrested her in the home of her second husband.

The massive *hukou* system and the police force's tireless efforts to keep information up to date allowed officers to track down suspects and detect criminal elements in the neighborhoods. Not only was it an effective anti-crime measure, but the *hukou* record also enabled the government to plan and perform other administrative tasks, from rationing food to political control. Commanding a better knowledge of the city and an army of experienced police officers, the wartime urban governance vastly expanded the reach of the state. But the long list of unpopular policies they helped to put into effect and the increasingly intimidating manner of policing forever tarnished the paternal image that the police force had held essential to its operation. The above-cited novel by Lao She, *Sishi tongtang*, captures the downturn through one character, Police Sergeant Bai, whose administrative career under the Japanese occupation embodies both the irrevocable loss of the sense of self-pride in the officer himself and the ultimate demise of paternalistic policing in Beijing. The novel depicts Sergeant Bai as a confident, caring person who commanded an extensive knowledge of the neighborhood under his watch and took pride in his skillfulness making official policies sensible and resolving many kinds of disputes:

> Sergeant Pai [Bai] was over forty years old. He was clean-shaven and looked energetic. He was very talkative. When he came to the houses of the families—when they fought or quarreled—he was able at the same time to scold them and pacify them. He could thus melt the big problems down to small ones and melt the small ones away. . . . He knows very well that his duties were heavy and great. If there are no police, there is no order, and although he was only sergeant of police for the Little Sheep Fold district, he felt that the whole of Peiping, more or less belonged to him.[71]

71. Strand, *Rickshaw Beijing*, p. 81.

During the occupation Sergeant Bai continued to work for the collaborationist government, not for political reasons but to earn a living. However, the wartime work shattered his sense of righteousness and strained his relationship with residents in his jurisdiction. He was given disagreeable assignments one after another. For example, he had to instruct families to destroy books written in foreign languages or containing anti-Japanese messages, to install customized radio sets to listen to official broadcasting, to enforce the blackout rule by asking residents to cover their windows with black paper, to collect scrap metals, and to assist Japanese soldiers and Chinese secret police to arrest people who failed to follow government rules. Sometimes Sergeant Bai was able to persuade residents to follow these undesirable wartime security measures. But oftentimes he felt frustrated, embarrassed, and humiliated as the wartime policing mission was clearly against his accustomed role as neighborhood mediator and protector. In one instance, Sergeant Bai had to lead Japanese military police to raid the house of a respected scholar. While at the scene:

> There were still four brawny [Japanese] soldiers behind him, so he suppressed his anger. Once the city fell, he knew he would have to work for the enemy and assault his fellowmen. There was no way he could avoid carrying out this kind of shameful task unless he took off his uniform, but he could not remove his uniform. His skills, qualifications and the livelihood of his family had decided for him that he had to perform these debasing tasks. . . . He could not stand straight in front of his fellowmen, what a "pitiful scum" (*kelian chong* 可憐蟲).[72]

If he felt ashamed of himself for taking part in arresting his fellow men, Sergeant Bai was literally consumed by guilt when witnessing his right-hand man, the *baojia* headman, being beaten to death by Japanese soldiers. Unable to steel himself to the despicable work, he turned his anger on other collaborators.

> His long face turned white as paper; he was sweating on his forehead. He stood up straight and fixed his eyes forward, but he could not see anything. He was no longer Sergeant Bai, he was a five- or six-foot tall "fearsome demon" (*zhuiming gui* 追命鬼). The past and the future did not

72. Lao She, *Sishi tongtang*, p. 127.

> matter to him anymore; guile and honesty were of no difference to him. His "hopes were destroyed" (*wannian juhui* 萬念俱灰), and he had only the desire to shove a knife deep into the flesh of his enemy, and end his own life afterward. He walked toward the screen wall of no. 3, and stood still. He had an epiphany — he had been civil and disciplined all his life, was he really going to kill people now? He stood there disoriented, at a loss for what to do.[73]

The Japanese occupation over Beijing would not have been so tight, thorough, and efficient without the Chinese police's cooperation and diligent work. But this very instrumental and indispensable role in helping a foreign enemy enforce law and order alienated the police from Chinese residents. The tarnished image of the police never recovered and was felt beyond the fictional world of Sergeant Bai and after the occupational years, and it struck a chord with the broader local society. On the eve of the Chinese recovery of Beijing, the Police Department found that it no longer enjoyed the position as the city's benevolent protector; instead it was vilified as the "talons and teeth of the Japs" (*rikou zhaoya* 日寇爪牙) by local residents.[74]

The Police Department had to salvage its credibility and legitimacy by repudiating, as much as possible, its association with the Japanese occupational authority. For example, on February 7, 1946, the English newspaper *Peiping Chronicle* published an article accusing the female police force of "caus[ing] considerable inconvenience to the women going in or out of the city gates."[75] The newspaper went further, arguing that it was a "despicable agency" (*beibi zuzhi* 卑鄙組織) "left behind by the enemy or bogus regime" and therefore the "public enemy" (*gongdi* 公敵).[76] The Police Department had to defend the female police force against accusations. To repudiate any association with the Japanese occupiers and collaborationist regime was absolutely essential.

The Police Department claimed that the idea to establish a female unit was first brought forward in 1923 as part of the early Republican government's larger police reform program that sought to revamp the

73. Lao She, *Sishi tongtang*, p. 215.
74. BPSJCJ, J181-10-236, "Beipingshi jingchaju youguan zujian nüzi jingchadui de baogao he baokan huifu," 1946.
75. Ibid.
76. Ibid.

moribund system of law enforcement left by the Qing dynasty. However, the warlord strife and frequent regime changes delayed the progress, and it was not until six years later in 1933 that Beijing saw its first women police. Both the female unit and the larger policing operation were designed for the public good, to protect "society from the dissolution and lawlessness born of unbridled lasciviousness and all manner of improper social relations."[77] The Police Department's response to the newspaper's criticism reflected what had grown into a greater endeavor, mounted by the GMD government, to renounce the institutional experience under occupation. In doing so, it hoped to regain the police's credibility and legitimacy as an effective and reliable force to maintain "domestic peace and order," which was absolutely crucial to China's "national reconstruction" in the wake of its bitter victory over Japan.[78]

Three years after the newspaper article was published, the Beijing police force faced another enemy — the Communist takeover. The CCP cadres, especially the underground operatives, were no strangers to the control system put in place by the GMD and its predecessors. In their calculation, the police force and the *baojia* system, along with the entire civil administration, the military force, and the judiciary, represented the pillars of the enemy state. The old urban governance must be destroyed; and it was on its ruins that the people's government was to be built.[79] The Communist troops officially entered Beijing on January 31, 1949. The cadres were immediately dispatched to take over various municipal bureaus, including the Police Department. While revamping the branches of urban governance, the CCP intentionally sought mass support. Public "denunciation meetings" (*suku* 訴苦) were organized at both district and neighborhood levels, and every household must send at least one person to attend the meeting. Women were asked to participate and to voice their anger at the police and *baojia* headmen under the collaborationist government and the GMD regime. It seems from the meeting minutes that many women held nuanced views toward

77. Ibid.
78. Ibid.
79. "Zhonggong Beiping shiwei guanyu ruhe jinxing jieguan Beiping gongzuo de tonggao" [The Beijing Municipal Committee of the Chinese Communist Party: Declaration of how to carry out takeover works in Beijing], December 21, 1949. From Beijingshi dang'anguan and Zhonggong Beijing shiwei dangshi yanjiushi, *Beijingshi zhongyao wenxian xuanbian (1948.12-1949)*, p. 18.

baojia headmen. In one instance, a woman said that they "were not bad people" and they "had no choice but carry out [unpopular policy] ordered by their superiors."[80] In sharp contrast, other women spoke out explicitly against the police officers: "When we came to them for help, they always turned their back on us"; "There was a local family who reported to police after being bullied by a rogue, but the officer refused to take her case and even hit her [to drive her away]"; "Police officers were tough on us!"[81]

Notwithstanding the inconsistency in the women's views, the CCP lumped together the police and the *baojia* and condemned them as the embodiment of the "reactionary state apparatus" (*fandong de guojia jiqi* 反動的國家機器), and abolished them both. The *baojia* headmen would be "called in and ordered to stand to one side"; "their might in the old days shone no more" (*qudiao tamen xiri de weifeng* 去掉他們昔日的威風).[82] The Party's revolutionary policy would be reiterated in detail, and the *baojia* headmen's "joint pledges (*qiejie* 切結) would be read out immediately" so that "the masses could fully understand [the Party's] intentions."[83] "Other unlawful acts could either be revealed then and there," the Party emphasized, "or they could be reported in confidence to the Council of Military Control, the garrison headquarters, the municipal and district's democratic governments," for "the crimes to be thoroughly investigated and justly punished."[84]

With regard to police officers, they along with other civil servants of the old regime were subjected to a review process during which their political views and official careers came under Communist cadres' scrutiny. The result would determine their future in the new regime. It was reported that by May 1, 1949, about two-thirds of GMD civil servants passed the political screening. They were put through rigorous

80. "Di'er gongzuozu funü gongzuo zongjie: dui baojiazhang, jingcha de yinxiang" [Summary of women's work managed by the second work team: Impression of *baojia* headmen and police officers], from CCPBJQW, 40-1-36, "Diliuqu shiyi yuefen funü gongzuo zongjie."

81. Ibid.

82. "Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu chuli baojia renyuan banfa de zhishi," [The Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party: direction regarding the disposing of *baojia* personnel], from Beijingshi dang'anguan and Zhonggong Beijing shiwei dangshi yanjiushi, *Beijingshi zhongyao wenxian xuanbian*, pp. 61–62.

83. Ibid.

84. Ibid.

thought reform sessions and given new assignments in the new CCP government.[85] However, their public service record and in particular their association with enemy regimes made them politically suspicious and thus targets of political purges in Mao's era in the decades to come.

Conclusion

By the 1940s, the cultural milieu had become more open in terms of accepting, and even encouraging, women to venture into the public sphere. Improved road conditions and new travel services further enhanced women's mobility. During the times when war and occupation devastated household economy, mobility became a survival tactic that helped women eke out a precarious livelihood. In the process, women participated in market transactions and pursued innovative and sometimes illegal strategies to make money from the circulation of products of illegal variety, and from sexual and reproductive labor. Their border-crossing experiences shift the history and historiography of roads and railways in modern China from a masculine world of technological innovation, business operation, and wartime transport to a chaotic space where legitimate travel intersected with illegal dealings, a hetero-social space where women could mingle with fellow passengers (mostly men), and an anonymous space that set women free from the watchful eyes of family members and neighbors.

Illegal transactions and criminal entrepreneurship drove security campaigns and gave rise to a constellation of control systems in wartime Beijing. Two signature measures—the household registration system and the residence card—represented two different approaches to ruling a society that had become increasingly mobile. The first system followed the imperial control principle of organizing the population into households—either a natural family based on biological and kinship relations or a surrogate one based on shared residence—and then bringing these control units under bureaucratic management. Different from this

85. "Zhonggong Beijing shiwei guanyu jiu renyuan chuli yuanze xiang Zhongyang, Huabeiju de qingshi baogao," from Beijingshi dang'anguan and Zhonggong Beijing shiwei dangshi yanjiushi, *Beijingshi zhongyao wenxian xuanbian*, pp. 222–23.

collective approach, the residence card focused on the individual. By issuing a portable form of identity proof to individuals, law enforcement officials could effectively examine the bearer's identity anytime and anywhere.

The new security control measures vastly expanded the policing authority and reach of the state. The massive security system allowed urban administrators to handle quotidian tasks, such as conducting population censuses and documenting births and deaths, more thoroughly and efficiently. It also supported the war effort by allowing the government to ration food supplies, extract resources from the civilian population, and crack down on suspicious people and activities. The wartime policing, however condemned by the post-war Communist revolution, provided both models and precedents upon which the surveillance state in the People's Republic of China was ultimately built. By mid-1949, the new CCP grassroots rule began to take shape, and it presented itself as a hybrid of the original structure and new staff. The overall structure of *baojia* was retained, but new names were adopted. The *bao* unit was combined and converted into "street government" (*jie zhengfu* 街政府), and the *jia* unit was converted into *lü* 閭, or so-called resident's groups (*jumin xiaozu* 居民小組). The *baojia* personnel were replaced with cadres and neighborhood activists.

The CCP criticized the GMD urban governance for alienating the people and infesting officials with "bureaucratism" (*guanliao zhuyi* 官僚主義) and "formalism" (*xingshi zhuyi* 形式主義), which created significant antagonism between government and the society it aimed to govern.[86] Presenting itself as an invigorated and populist force, the CCP sought to enlist activists in successive campaigns and put them in charge of some administrative duties. Therefore, the head of the street government was a cadre appointed by the district government; his staff, which included one associate director, four representatives (who managed household registration, finance affairs, and cultural and educational activities), one clerical staff, and one mail delivery staff, were all residents of the community. The district government subsidized the street

86. "Beipingshi zhi'an weiyuanhui guanyu zhi'an yundong de zhishi" [The Beijing Public Security Commission's instruction on the public security movement], March 24, 1949. From Beijingshi dang'anguan and Zhonggong Beijing shiwei dangshi yanjiushi, *Beijingshi zhongyao wenxian xuanbian*, p. 308.

government's operation; but all administrative and mobilization work below the street level fell on the shoulders of the activists.[87] Women were put in charge of the process of dismantling the old control system and instituting the new one. Their participation, support, and, most importantly, their initiative and leadership earned them a permanent place in the new neighborhood management structure in the People's Republic of China.

87. "Beipingshi renmin zhengfu guanyu feichu baojia zhidu jianli jiexiang zhengfu chubu cao'an" [Beijing People's Municipal Government: Draft of abolishing the *baojia* system and establishing street and village governments], March, 1949. From Beijingshi dang'anguan and Zhonggong Beijing shiwei dangshi yanjiushi, *Beijingshi zhongyao wenxian xuanbian*, pp. 326–29.

Conclusion

By placing runaway wives at the center of the inquiry, this book has sought to illuminate the life experiences of lower-class women and, in particular, their struggles and tactics of survival in wartime Beijing. Criminal case files examined in the preceding chapters illustrate a spectrum of choices available to women once they took flight from their husbands and homes. They might seek to form stable new marital relationships (albeit without divorcing their previous husbands) or improvise a variety of temporary arrangements, from cohabitation to prostitution. Once caught by police, or made to stand trial, runaway wives routinely gave accounts of hopeless struggles and endless suffering in the official case records. Their sensational and emotional testimonies often portrayed them as victims caught up in difficult personal relationships with, for example, bankrupt husbands or abusive in-laws. To a great extent, they also perceived the structural problems of the urban economy as a crucial force contributing to their domestic torment and driving their desperate choices. In the context of the prolonged recession in Beijing in the 1930s and 1940s, household production declined and the family wage economy failed to take root. Women's accustomed dependence on spousal and familial support became increasingly untenable, and the ability of women to live on their own was greatly diminished. Women also blamed the forces of war, military occupation, and wartime hyperinflation for driving them away from the normal path of womanhood—a steady job, a stable conjugal relationship, and sexual morality—defined by contemporary political and social leaders.

A closer examination of women's experiences, however, allows us to see lower-class women as more than individual victims of male exploita-

tion and family oppression. Neither do I regard women as collective victims living in the grip of devastating impersonal forces such political turmoil and economic crisis. As noted by the ways in which women plotted elopement and managed their lives afterwards, they responded to challenges creatively. By using their sexual and reproductive labors, by tying individual fortune to regional markets, by turning social norms of male domination to serve their own interests, and by exploiting the cracks in the urban control system, women managed to live in transition, between men, marriages, families, and neighborhoods.

The most important resource that women drew upon to support themselves in flight was the tenement community and the neighborhood connections that it fostered. Most runaway wives whose encounters with the legal system are detailed in the case records lacked steady formal employment. Therefore, they differed from other female groups such as women workers, women students, women professionals, and women soldiers. Members of these other female groups could potentially negotiate and advance their interests through organized activities, while runaway wives, and unemployed women living in wartime Beijing tenement neighborhoods in general, were left on their own. They thus located a different source of tangible help. Through myriad activities ranging from drop-in visits to sharing needlework and transmitting gossip, women were connected to their neighbors. A functioning social network formed accordingly, and it served multiple needs, including both casual amusement and more serious relationships or plots that could lead to elopement and a new marriage.

Moreover, daily life in the tenement neighborhood was organized around pre-existing norms and values, which facilitated elopement and gave it meaning. To interpret domestic support as a husband's responsibility provided a social justification for women to run away from home on the grounds of poverty. The customary nuptials allowed women to bypass bureaucratic procedures to establish a socially accepted marriage. Last but not least, the informal economy and sex trade allowed women to cash in on their productive, reproductive, and sexual labors outside the sphere of family and household production. Their living experiences, including both lawful conduct and illegal dealings and illegitimate relationships, allowed women to look for opportunities to raise themselves out of dire circumstances, to re-appropriate the male-dominated urban economic and social structures, and to do so without subscribing to the

reformist rhetoric and revolutionary discourses that sought to define and prescribe popular perceptions and practices.

In Wang Zheng's study of liberal women activists during the May Fourth era, the experience of one of her informants, Zhu Su'e, an attorney, provides an example of the ways in which running away from home could become a radical act symbolizing an electrifying step towards a feminist discourse of women's emancipation. In the informant's own words:

> People with knowledge are different; they can't be controlled by parents. If you arrange marriage for me, I will escape. . . . After I left home for school in Shanghai, my parents did not dare interfere with my life. They arranged my sisters' marriages, but not mine. . . . They knew that if they tried matchmaking for me, I would never visit home. They knew my personality, so they did not even try.[1]

Many feminist activists shared Zhu's view by celebrating female elopement as a rebellious gesture—to seize one's own destiny, to liberate oneself from conventional constraints, and to turn oneself into an equal member of society by pursuing opportunities for education, employment, and political participation. This emancipation discourse provided a powerful metaphor in the women's movement in early twentieth-century China; and it was advocated with great fervor by women reformers and revolutionaries from across the political spectrum. Helen Young's study of dozens of women veterans of the Long March provides more examples. For many women soldiers in the Red Army, running away to escape "from the abusive 'in-law' families they had been sold into," or running away from "unwanted arranged marriages," was the very first step in their decorated revolutionary career.[2]

However, the experiences of runaway wives described in this book do not fit the reformist or revolutionary image of female desertion. Most ran away from home under financial pressure. To them, the best scenario was to find a financially solvent husband and return to the life of a domestic dependent. Many willingly took flight again or came back to their original home after they had exhausted their limited resources.

1. Wang Zheng, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment*, pp. 193–94.
2. Helen Young, *Choosing Revolution*, p. 4.

Runaway wives' lived experiences suggest that the glorious reformist rhetoric of women's liberation was largely irrelevant to the daily struggles of people living in Beijing's tenement neighborhoods during the 1940s. Lower-class women organized and interpreted their lives around a different notion of womanhood that appeared decisively unreformed and used their sexual and reproductive labor in ways that might not conform to revolutionary discourse. The notion of a *local value system*, described by Clifford Geertz as a pattern of "self-knowledge, self-perception, [and] self-understanding," is very useful in explaining runaway wives' choices, as well as the social norms and cultural preferences that made their choices possible and socially acceptable.[3] To run away from home was, in most cases, an individual and spontaneous reaction to both opportunities and threats. Although the local value system drove and framed women's behaviors, it did not represent an alternative ideology that counterbalanced the reformist view or subverted the existing social and cultural norms that reformers strove to remove. It simply offered tools that helped women define marriage and family, as well as the neighborhood and the city, on their own terms in a world designed and administered by men. The local value system raised moral and security concerns among officials in wartime Beijing, and, as women found out, continued to be problematized and criminalized under the new socialist order after 1949.

Framing Everyday Suffering

Three years and four months after the GMD government recovered Beijing from the Japanese, the city was once again under siege. Over the course of seven days in mid-December 1948, the CCP troops sealed off the city and its GMD defenders. Another 1.6 million civilians were also trapped in the battle zone. Some were fearful of the possible carnage of battle, while others secretly prepared to welcome the inevitable Communist takeover. Most of them, however, were simply struggling with the hyperinflation, hunger, and death that had paralyzed the city and traumatized its population. The military deadlock ended on

3. Geertz, *Local Knowledge*, p. 232.

January 22, 1949, when General Fu Zuoyi, the commander-in-chief of the GMD army in north China, surrendered. When the GMD troops agreed to lay down their arms and move out of the city, Beijing entered a new phase.

The local residents had little knowledge of their new rulers, and rumors spread quickly. For example, women were saying that "the Eighth Route Army[4] doesn't let people wear nice clothing or eat good food," "women will be distributed [among cadres and soldiers] like 'food rations,'" and "children will be taken away [from their parents] and put under state care."[5] Amidst public anxiety and curiosity, the Communist troops marched into Beijing on January 31, 1949. Derk Bodde, an American scholar staying in Beijing at the time on a Fulbright Fellowship, witnessed this historical moment and recorded his first impression of the city and its population coming to terms with a new ruling force:

> Prominent in the parade were thousands of students and workers from schools and organizations throughout the city. Many of their colored paper banners and Mao Tse-tung portraits were torn to tatters by the wind. Among the students also marched some well-known university professors. Some groups danced to the rhythmic drum-and-gong beat of the *yang ko* or "planting song"—a simple traditional peasant dance performed in unison by large groups, which is already becoming enormously popular here as the result of the general Communist emphasis upon folk art. More familiar to me was a band of stilt walkers, cavorting merrily in colorful costumes above the heads of the crowd. Other groups, directed by "cheer leaders," chanted, as they marched, the famous "eight points" of Mao Tse-tung.[6]

Like Bodde and his Chinese servant, most local residents were impressed by their initial encounter with the soldiers of the People's Liberation Army—by the discipline, morale, and rustic exuberance that these soldiers displayed. In the following months, they would discover the ambition, resolution, and swift actions of their "liberators."

4. This is the unit number that the CCP troops adopted under the GMD command when both parties allied to fight the Japanese.
5. "Jige yundong: Sanba funüjie" [Several movements: the March 8 International Women's Day], from CCPBJQW, 40-2-55, "Diqiqu funü gongzuo bannian zongjie" [Summary of six-month women's work in No. 7 District], 1949.
6. Bodde, *Peking Diary*, p. 103.

Between February and November 1949, the CCP Municipal Government implemented a series of drastic measures: they took over and dismantled the municipal government agencies and the court system, registered disbanded soldiers and the GMD secret service personnel, abolished the *baojia* regimentation, overhauled the *hukou* system, and outlawed the circulation of the GMD currency. By November, most of the security structures and policing programs that had taken previous regimes decades to build and perfect were either abolished or revamped under the new authority. Although they stopped existing as operational systems, their effects continued to haunt many local residents in Beijing and became fodder for political mobilization. One of these residents was a forty-five-year-old woman surnamed Su.

Su was born into a laboring class family in Beijing. Her father died when she was young, and her mother managed to feed the family by working as a domestic servant. In 1923, Su married a restaurant apprentice at the age of nineteen, but the marriage did not improve her economic situation. She had to work several jobs—sewing leather, stitching buttonholes, making soles for cotton shoes, and working in the hospital laundry room—to supplement her family's income. In addition to the economic hardship she experienced daily, Su also recalled vividly two horrific incidents that almost destroyed her family. The first one occurred when Beijing was under Japanese occupation. The Japanese military police broke into her home while she was holding a wedding feast for her daughter. The unexpected home search disrupted the celebration, stunned Su's guests, and scared them away. Another incident happened in the final days of the GMD rule in 1948. In a desperate effort to defend the city against the looming Communist attack, the GMD army tried to draft as many young men as possible. On a windy night the GMD soldiers and *baojia* headmen showed up at the door of Su's home planning to draft her son. While they tried to force their way into the courtyard, her dog began barking fiercely and woke up everyone inside. Su's son jumped out of bed, climbed up on the roof, ran to the adjacent courtyard compound to hide, and barely escaped the draft.[7]

7. "Su dama shishi neng daitou" [Woman Su takes the lead on every matter], from BJFL, 84-2-6, "Beijingshi diyici funü daibiao dahui huikan" [Journal of the first women's congress in Beijing], November 29, 1949.

When Su recalled her two fateful encounters with the security force under the Japanese occupation and the GMD army, she was no longer an impoverished housewife but had embraced a new role as one of 371 women delegates who attended the First Municipal Women's Congress in Beijing in November 1949. She sat down with workers, peasants, students, teachers, social leaders, high-ranking CCP officials, and international guests from France, India, Iran, Korea, Vietnam, and the Netherlands; together they celebrated the Communist victory and drew the blueprint for a women's movement under the red flag. When she was not in meetings, Su gave an interview to a cadre-reporter who was preparing a newsletter for the congress. A featured report based on the interview was published shortly afterwards on November 29, which is the reason we know her story.[8]

As Su's political activism and her path to political stardom in revolutionary Beijing show, memories of the repressive security forces and control system, as well as financial hardships and social dislocations, were kept alive under the CCP's rule. Women were asked to attend "denunciation sessions" in factories, schools, and neighborhoods, where they were coached to tell their stories publicly and shape mundane details of their lives in the framework of class struggle and political revolution. Government agencies under the CCP who organized these events hoped to infuse political meaning and ideological clarity into what had been, to many women, deeply personal and fragmented experiences. They emphasized that women suffered in the past not at the hands of one ruffian police officer or one corrupt *baojia* headman but under the grip of the reactionary regime they represented. Such revolutionary rhetoric allowed cadres to accomplish two tasks. First, the GMD state apparatus was denounced as the symbol of an exploitative, repressive, and most of all counter-revolutionary regime that must be dismantled. Second, a shared sense of past misery and hatred towards the old regime offered a tangible means for women to grow a gratitude for the freedom and life security that the CCP claimed to provide; this, in turn, would breed a collective revolutionary consciousness among women who were otherwise divided by political orientations and socioeconomic backgrounds.

In the wake of its landslide victory and in preparation to deepen and broaden the revolution, cadres in charge of women's works

8. Ibid.

reported to the CCP municipal authority that the majority of women in Beijing were bound by practical concerns about individual livelihood and material gain. Most of them were victims of political instability and perpetual poverty in wartime Beijing, which made them dislike and distrust the incompetent and predatory GMD regime. In the same vein, most women were impressed by the revolutionary state's swift actions to bring peace and order to the war-torn city. But women remained largely indifferent to further political revolution and virtually inexperienced in mass movements. Moreover, reports contended that women did not share a collective voice. Social and economic divisions decided women's worldviews, social values, moral standards, political loyalty, cultural life, position on the urban economic ladder, and finally even their very tactics of survival. There had not been a single organization in Beijing that was either popular enough to represent women of different classes and social backgrounds or powerful enough to press for any radical political change. A significant number of local women, approximately 37 percent according to one source, lived outside of major institutions of production, education, and political activism.[9] Many of them came from the city's lower-class neighborhoods. Their sheer size means that without their participation and support, the Communist revolution would have remained incomplete and skin-deep.

The "multi-cellular organism" metaphor Kenneth Lieberthal uses to characterize Tianjin society in the early 1950s can also be used to describe the situation in Beijing—"it required complex forms of cooperation in order to function, but at the same time permitted cell walls to screen out all but the bare essentials that each minuscule part required from the whole."[10] The Communists were determined to introduce new representational means and devised new mobilization strategies to break "small circles" (*xiao quanzi* 小圈子), remove social and economic barriers, and forge an alliance under which the young and old, rich and poor, educated and illiterate, jobless and employed could communicate and work together to build a new socialist China. It was under this political circumstance that the meaning of women's experiences, particularly their sufferings at war and under "counter-revolutionary regimes," was

9. BJFL, 84-2-4, "Beijingshi funü gejie renshu tongji" [Statistics of women of different social groups in Beijing], 1949.
10. Lieberthal, *Revolution and Tradition in Tientsin*, 27.

forever changed. In this regard, the CCP was a master of capitalizing on women's suffering. It was through these politicized memories and the politics of remembering that the nascent Communist state attempted to build durable connections between women's personal experiences and the greater revolutionary process. Moreover, the process of politicizing women's past experiences and the skill of interpreting their life events within the revolutionary discourse empowered many women by offering them a strategy of political advancement in revolutionary China.

Remaking the Neighborhood Economy

Living under the red flag, lower-class women would find that the revolutionary politics not only changed the ways they interpreted past experiences but also their means of earning a living. Upon entering Beijing and seeking ways to recover the war-torn economy, the CCP municipal authority conducted several surveys of conditions of employment. The results revealed that the majority of adult women in Beijing were not gainfully employed. One survey of an alley neighborhood in the Inner-1 District, for instance, indicated that among the 358 adult women residents, 10 educated women worked for the government and other business and cultural institutions, 2 were domestic servants, 3 worked in handicraft workshops, and the rest were all unemployed.[11] These surveys on the one hand suggested that the majority of women contributed little to family income and relied upon other family members for financial support. On the other hand, they identified a vast pool of productive laborers, which was a crucial resource for the revolutionary state in its effort to rebuild the economy and bring individuals out of poverty and deprivation. To be clear, the long-term economic plan as officially projected was to industrialize the city's consumerist economy. The economic future of the socialist capital was built on a robust manufacturing sector. However, this great industrial vision could not be realized over a short period of

11. "Diaocha jieguo" [Result of the survey], from BJFL, 84-2-24, "Neiyiqu funü zhongdian diaocha de chubu zongjie cailiao" [Preliminary summary of key survey of women in the Inner-1 District], 1950.

time; women who were currently living at the edge of subsistence needed immediate relief. Under this rather precarious economy, the government saw the neighborhood-based cooperative as a workable alternative for the time period before it could readily allocate women to production works.

The municipal authority worked through district governments to instruct women living in the same neighborhood to unite themselves and pool their resources to make handicraft products and provide other types of services. Hundreds of thousands of cooperatives were established within a short period of time to make cigarettes, shoe soles, embroideries, hemp ropes, matchboxes, and toothbrushes. There were also service-oriented cooperatives, for example washing and repairing cotton-padded clothing for soldiers. The district governments not only promoted the cooperative programs through its powerful propaganda machines but also aided their day-to-day operations and brought in business contracts. For example, the Government of No. 5 District sent cadres to take over a GMD army warehouse located at the Meridian Gate of the Forbidden City, where they found several thousand pieces of brand-new GMD uniforms. The district government decided to use them as uniforms for Communist soldiers and cadres and then awarded the contract for their repair to dozens of cooperatives in the district.[12] The government also offered the capital. For example, women from the hemp rope cooperative of Anyuan Alley neighborhood received a bag of "relief flour" (*jiuji liang* 救濟糧) from the District Office of Civil Affairs with which they bought five reeling machines to start their operation.[13] Some cooperatives sought government's help to sell their products. Although the government was not able to dictate the market, it did occasionally try to generate market demand for the products the women made. Sometimes, the government instructed its employees to use their own stipend to buy back products that failed to attract general buyers on the market.[14]

12. CCPBJQW, 40-2-116, "Diwuqu funü gongzuo zongjie" [Summary of women's work in the No. 5 District], May 15, 1950.
13. "Sanyuefen shengchan gongzuo qingkuang huibao" [Report of production work in March], from CCPBJQW, 40-2-55, "Neiqiqu funüzu sanyuefen shengchan gongzuo qingkuang huibao" [Women's team in the Inner-7 District: Report of production work in March], March 14, 1950.
14. "Funü shengchan qingxing," from CCPBJQW, 40-2-55, "Diqiqu funü gongzuo

It is important to note that neighborhood cooperatives hardly achieved the economic development goals set for them by the government. They were not self-propelled. Some cooperatives did not connect women to the wider market that would give them more employment opportunities; others just threw women into the market before they were fully prepared for competition. Given how short-lived they were, it is difficult to assess the degree to which neighborhood cooperatives actually improved women's material lives. However, the cooperatives were more than a business operation—they were also part of a political campaign. Although a lot of them failed financially, the cooperatives had in fact fulfilled many of their political promises. Most of all, the cooperative work programs allowed the government to begin reordering the city's neighborhood-based economy. Government support largely determined if and for how long the cooperatives could operate. CCP cadres and government officials well understood the leverage they had in terms of allocating contracts and key resources and controlling the market. Women of certain backgrounds, such as family members of workers, army soldiers, and "revolutionary martyrs" (*geming lieshi* 革命烈士), were treated favorably.[15] By compensating and rewarding its key supporters, the revolutionary state attempted to motivate them to make new contributions to the citywide reconstruction. In this regard, neighborhood cooperatives started as a member-owned practice, and women joined freely and set up the workshop in accordance with their needs and priorities. However, their day-to-day operation became increasingly attached to government subsidies and objectives, which gave the revolutionary state expanding opportunities and greater leverage to organize women's productive labor to serve government initiatives. As cadres replaced neighbors, and government support replaced neighborhood assistance, the socialist planned economy began making inroads in shaping ordinary women's everyday economic lives.

bannian zongjie" [Semi-annual summary of women's work in the No. 7 District], June 1950.

15. Ibid.

Women and Socialist Grassroots Governance

The neighborhood cooperative campaign was one of those movements that the nascent revolutionary state devised to create an institutional space where women were coached to explore their new voice and identity by practicing political activism. But different from massive campaigns such as those initiated to suppress counter-revolutionary enemies, take over city industries, and overhaul municipal governments, this movement did not require women to work away from their home space, nor did it call for special political training or new industrial skills. It turned those quotidian neighborhood production activities and economic transactions that once had helped impoverished women make a living during wartime into a political act for the revolutionary state to garner women's support for the new regime. Besides taking part in the neighborhood cooperative campaign, women were mobilized to enroll in study sessions (*funü ban* 婦女班) and night schools (*yexiao* 夜校), as well as to participate in activities to "reward soldiers" (*laojun* 勞軍) and "prevent epidemics" (*fangyi* 防疫). Through these neighborhood-level political activities, the revolutionary state expected women to express their enthusiasm and political confidence; and more importantly, the revolution placed women, who had long been kept on the margin of urban politics, at the center of the political campaign to build the socialist grassroots governance.

In one revealing case, a local woman named Wei Yafang, wife of a trumpeter, had kept a busy, exciting, and exhausting everyday regimen since the CCP took over the city. She headed the "sanitation team," was elected the "women's representative" (*funü daibiao* 婦女代表) of her neighborhood, and was a member of the neighborhood "propaganda team" (*xuanchuandui* 宣傳隊) and the district branch of the Society to Resist America and Aid Korea. Titles and memberships entailed duties and responsibilities. As the head of the sanitation team, for instance, she received instructions from the civil affair cadres (*minzheng ganshi* 民政幹事) and officers from the police precinct office and passed them down to her subordinates in the neighborhood. She also supervised street cleaning, inoculations, and public health classes. As the women's representative, she spoke on behalf of women from about forty households in her neighborhood. The primary tasks included, but were not

limited to, celebrating the March 8 International Women's Day, organizing lectures on women's health and childcare practices, explaining the new marriage law, and mediating domestic disputes. The propaganda work required her to organize neighborhood political meetings, prepare wall posters, and run a neighborhood theater troupe. Being a member of the Society to Resist America and Aid Korea, she was in charge of organizing demonstrations, study sessions, and "public denunciation meetings" (*kongsu dahui* 控訴大會), collecting signatures from local residents for the "peace petition" (*heping xuanyan* 和平宣言), and drafting the "patriotic pact" (*aiguo gongyue* 愛國公約).[16]

Since the takeover in early 1949, the Municipal Government had created an impressive number of such neighborhood governance groups in Beijing. The members of the laboring classes in particular were recruited to manage social programs and community services. Their participation, support, and, most importantly, their initiative and leadership, earned them a permanent place in the new neighborhood management structure under the Communist rule. But as these women were drawn into a busy cycle of political and administrative activities, officials worried. There were simply too many of these neighborhood organizations, more than twenty of them altogether by one count.[17] Reports found that most activists held three or four posts, some seven or eight posts, and in one extreme case the leading woman activist carried more than ten posts.[18]

For more than three years, between 1950 and 1952, various party policy study groups and state agencies followed the progress of the grassroots administration. Reports they released all pointed to the same set of problems: redundancy, inefficiency, and a lack of focus and coordination, which ultimately prompted administrative reform in 1952. The core of the reform was to streamline all existing neighborhood organizations and install the Residents' Committee (*juweihui* 居委會).

16. "Jiji fenzi gaikuang" [Conditions of political activists], from BJSZF, 2-20-947, "Diqiqu dijiu paichusuo qunzhong zuzhi gaikuang" [Conditions of mass organizations within the jurisdiction of No. 9 police precinct in the No. 7 District].
17. "Jiedao zuzhi de hunluan xianxiang" [Chaotic situations of neighborhood organizations], from CCPBJSW, 1-9-250, "Guanyu chengqu jiedao zuzhi de qingkuang yu gaijin yijian" [Situations of urban neighborhood organizations and opinions about their improvements], October 14, 1952.
18. Ibid.

After the reform, activists normally did not hold more than one post, except for a small number of them who served on independent women's committees. The new institution reinforced the neighborhood as a space specifically for women to seek their political voice and explore political visibility in revolutionary Beijing. Women were massively recruited to fill up neighborhood administrative positions. A survey of nineteen residents' committees in four districts showed that women made up 44 percent of committee members (69 women out of 157) and 69 percent of resident representatives (578 out of 833).[19] These women often headed other groups as well. For the Residents' Committee of Xingsheng Alley, for instance, women headed the Democratic Water Management Station, the Committee for Cooperative Works, the Neighborhood Red Cross Society, and the Committee for Women and Children's Health.[20] When cadres read about these impressive numbers and statistics, they felt proud of their efforts to bring women into the political process. They charged that the Nationalist regime suppressed women by denying them a voice in politics and crushing their class-consciousness. To them, the mission to overthrow the old regime encompassed a change in gender perspectives. As Wang Zheng put it, the revolution "feminized the public arena" by recruiting women as the Party's foot soldiers for basic neighborhood management. As women became "prominent figures in local administration," the CCP made significant progress in terms of "creat[ing] a socialist state effect in residents' daily life."[21]

After only a few months under the revolutionary government, lower-class women began to realize that the story of regime change in 1949 was more nuanced and complicated than just a shift of political power from the demoralized GMD to the exuberant CCP. The revolutionary

19. "Dongdan, Xuanwu, Xidan, Dongsi deng sige qu shijian jiedao jumin weiyuanhui qingkuang tongjibiao" [Survey of the experimental resident's committee in Dongdan, Xuanwu, Xidan, and Dongsi districts], January 1, 1953. From BJSZF, 2-5-63, "Dongdan, Xidan, Dongsi, Xuanwu deng sige qu shijian jiedao jumin weiyuanhui de qingkuang ji cunzai de wenti."
20. "Xingsheng hutong jumin weiyuanhui qingkuang" [Conditions of the Residents' Committee of Xingsheng Alley], 1953. From BJSZF, 2-5-63, "Dongdan, Xidan, Dongsi, Xuanwu deng sige qu shijian jiedao jumin weiyuanhui de qingkuang ji cunzai de wenti."
21. Wang Zheng, "Gender and Maoist Urban Reorganization," pp. 189–90.

government promised local residents in Beijing an effective and responsive governance, a freer and happier society, a better and more secured livelihood, and a more productive and politically engaged lifestyle, all of which constituted a new China (*xin Zhongguo* 新中國). When striving to realize these ideals, it on the one hand vowed to destroy the existing state apparatus and purge its designers and executors; on the other hand it claimed to create a new system of political and social control based on the combined mechanisms of political indoctrination, bureaucratic intervention, and communal voluntarism. Such a system was expected to translate grand revolutionary ambition into manageable everyday routines. As the campaigns penetrated everyday life and changed the social and cultural makeup of the neighborhood community, the revolutionary agenda not only exposed women to new political spectacles, standards of conduct, and languages and ideologies but also sought to influence their beliefs and behaviors.

Women found that some of their past experience retained relevancy and even gained a revolutionary meaning in the post-1949 political discourse. Their heart-wrenching accounts of domestic abuse, spousal abandonment, and abject poverty helped to discredit those predatory regimes in the past and legitimize the Communist takeover. However, many of their survival strategies did not pass the Communist moral and security scrutiny. They were condemned and criminalized under the new socialist order. For example, trafficking women remained a criminal offense under the Communist law. Trade of many items, from food grains to other daily necessities, in private markets would be restricted and later prohibited for their potential to undermine the socialist economic order. Prostitution (in both formal and casual forms) was denounced as a social vice and thus outlawed. On November 21, 1949, less than two months after the founding of the People's Republic of China, the Municipal Government closed all brothels in Beijing overnight. It proudly declared the next morning that the new Communist state had successfully ended the perennial system of sexual and economic exploitation of women in the nation's capital. Last but not least, the Communist state also imposed a rather stringent moral code that banned out-of-wedlock sexual relationships. Women and men who engaged in such activities were condemned for not conforming to socialist values and "messing up relationships between men and women" (*luan gao nannü guanxi* 亂搞男女關係). While the

socialist morality continued to stigmatize sexual relationships outside of marriage, the revolutionary government, so firmly believing in labor and discipline, made every effort to harness women's productive labor to build the socialist political economy.

The revolutionary government launched numerous campaigns and created an impressive number of grassroots groups in Beijing. Women were asked to take an active part in these neighborhood-level campaigns and organizations and to learn the new Communist standard of conduct, language, and ideology. They were coached to articulate their enthusiasm and exercise their leadership, and their participation and contribution were openly recognized and praised. But this new political order had a mixed impact on women's choices and tactics of survival. Wang Zheng has shown that the CCP restricted feminist movements and censored activists' writings. Their careers were hijacked and their voices silenced.[22] The laboring-class women were also in the same situation even though they might not have been conscious of it. Although they were given venues and incentives to express their political voice as the Communist government intentionally brought them to the forefront of all campaigns and placed them in the spotlight of neighborhood governance, they, like those in other women's groups, had to learn to voice their views and exercise their political activism within the boundaries prescribed by the government.

From time to time, women's concerns and daily routines derived from the past did influence the speed, direction, and strategies of the revolution. For example, women's lack of collective political experience and preoccupation with domestic chores required that cadres package larger political spectacles in the form of day-to-day operations and face-to-face interactions. But as the government extended its power into courtyard neighborhoods in Beijing, the very neighborhood networks and customary practices that had given lower-class women leverage in negotiating and asserting their interests in the past came under attack under the socialist economy and grassroots control. Even if the revolutionary government did not immediately eradicate all past practices or transform every single lower-class woman into an activist for communism, it began to make women's attempts to maintain a leverage in negotiating and asserting their interests apart from the revolutionary

22. Wang Zheng, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment*.

politics increasingly problematic and, eventually, utterly untenable. In this regard, the grassroots campaigns in the early 1950s signified a new beginning of the process of building a socialist neighborhood and idea of womanhood in the years to come. It was not until the 1980s that post-Mao reforms once again set migration, urbanization, industrialization, and globalization in motion. These processes capitalize on women's productive labor, commercialize their sexual appeal, and transform their intimate practices. As women once again move between rural and urban China, between the capitalist market and the post-socialist state, their everyday lives and tactics transform and redefine social and moral geographies in Beijing and other twenty-first century Chinese cities.

Bibliography

The following abbreviations are used in the footnotes.

BJFL	Beijingshi funü lianhehui 北京市婦女聯合會 Beijing Municipal Women's Federation
BJSZF	Beijingshi zhengfu 北京市政府 Beijing Municipal Government (after 1949)
BJZGH	Beijingshi zonggonghui 北京市總工會 Beijing Municipal General Workers' Union
BPDFFY	Beiping difang fayuan 北平地方法院 Beijing District Court
BPHG	Jin haiguan Beiping fenguan 津海關北平分關 Beijing Regional Office, Tianjin General Customs
BPNZZYXX	Beiping nüzi zhiye xuexiao 北平女子職業學校 Beijing Vocational School for Women
BPSGQGS	Beipingshi ge qugongsuo 北平市各區公所 District Offices of Beijing
BPSJ	Caizhengbu jicharequ zhijieshuiju Beiping fenju 財政部冀察熱區直接稅局 北平分局 Tax Office in Beijing, Region of Hebei, Chahar, and Rehe Provinces, Ministry of Finance
BPSJCJ	Beipingshi jingchaju 北平市警察局 Beijing Municipal Police Department
BPSJCJNC	Beipingshi jingchaju neicheng ge fenju 北平市警察局内城各分局 Police precinct offices in the Inner City, Beijing Municipal Police Department
BPSJCJWC	Beipingshi jingchaju waicheng ge fenju 北平市警察局外城各分局 Police precinct offfices in the Outer City, Beijing Municipal Police Department
BPSMZJ	Beipingshi minzhengju 北平市民政局 Bureau of Civil Administration (Beijing)
BPSSHJ	Beipingshi shehuiju 北平市社會局 Bureau of Social Affairs (Beijing)

BPSZF	Beipingshi zhengfu 北平市政府 Beijing Municipal Government (before 1949)
CCPBJQW	Zhonggong Beijing shiwei diwu quwei 中共北京市第五區委 Chinese Communist Party Committee of the No. 5 District of Beijing
CCPBJSW	Zhonggong Beijing shiwei 中共北京市委 Chinese Communist Party Beijing Municipal Committee
JTYHBJFH	Jiaotong yinhang Beijing fenhang 交通銀行北京分行 Beijing Branch, Bank of Communication
ZQ	Beijingshi dang'anguan cang ziliao: Jianguo qian 北京市檔案館藏資料: 建國前 Historical Materials Preserved at Beijing Municipal Archives: Pre-1949

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